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ABSTRACT

The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration, a multi-site national project, tested a new approach to child support enforcement for low-income noncustodial parents (NCPs). Findings were drawn on survey responses of 2,005 custodial parents, mothers of children for whom NCPs owed child support. The sample was randomly assigned to a program group, subject to mandatory participation in PFS, or a control group not eligible for PFS services. Key findings indicated low-income NCPs targeted by the PFS program had widely varying levels of involvement with their children; NCPs in the PFS program group were more likely to provide formal child support; and PFS did not change the likelihood that NCPs would provide informal support, but led to a small reduction in the average value of informal support given. Analysis of PFS impacts by subgroups suggested future programs can reduce the likelihood that NCPs will cut back on their informal contributions by taking these two steps: (1) increasing earnings capacity of the most disadvantaged NCPs; and (2) developing innovative ways to encourage fathers to maintain informal support. PFS did not increase the amount of contact fathers had

with their children, but increased fathers' efforts to engage in active parenting, increased frequency of discussions about the child among parents with the youngest children, and increased the likelihood of visits for NCPs with no high school credential. (Appendixes contain additional tables and 33 references.) (YLB)

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This report is based on research conducted for the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration, a national demonstration project that combined job training and placement, peer support groups, and other services with the goal of increasing the earnings and child support payments of unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare, improving their parenting and communication skills, and providing an opportunity for them to participate more fully and effectively in the lives of their children.

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The findings and conclusions presented in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders or the participating states. Interested readers may wish to contact the states for more information on the program. The sites and states in the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration are Los Angeles Parents' Fair Share Project, Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), California; Duval County Parents' Fair Share Project, Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida; MassJOBS Parents' Fair Share Project, Hampden County (Springfield), Massachusetts; Kent County Parents' Fair Share Project, Kent County (Grand Rapids), Michigan; Operation Fatherhood, Mercer County (Trenton), New Jersey; Options for Parental Training and Support (OPTS), Montgomery County (Dayton), Ohio; and Tennessee Parents' Fair Share Project, Shelby County (Memphis), Tennessee.

Publications from the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

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Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment. 2000. John Martinez, Cynthia Miller.

The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum. 2000. Eileen Hayes, with Kay Sherwood.

Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood (Russell Sage Foundation). 1999. Earl Johnson, Ann Levine, Fred Doolittle.

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Preface

For the past two decades, the nation's efforts to reform the welfare system and the child support system have often proceeded on separate tracks. Welfare reform has been focused on reworking the social contract between government and single mothers who received assistance from what was the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) system and is now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Child support enforcement has been moving toward an increasingly standardized structure that enables states to collect support more effectively, particularly from men who are stably employed. As both systems have moved ahead, however, there has been a growing realization that neither has very explicitly considered how to work with the group of men who bridge them both: low-income noncustodial fathers whose children receive welfare. With this realization has come an array of new activities at the community, state, and federal levels aimed at building new supports for the efforts of low-income men to support, and father, their children.

These new efforts face the difficulty that, relative to research on single mothers and the programs that serve them, there is surprisingly little information available about how best to support the efforts of low-income fathers at providing for their children. What proportion of men whose children are on TANF can realistically be expected to provide substantial support for their children? How can TANF, child support, or the Workforce Investment system increase their capacity to do so? In what proportion of "single-parent" families receiving TANF are the fathers actually a significant presence in their children's lives, and how should this affect our thinking about how to work with these families?

The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration, run from 1994 to 1996, was aimed at increasing the ability of these fathers to attain well-paying jobs, to increase their child support payments, and to increase their involvement in parenting in other ways. This report — one of two being issued concurrently from MDRC's evaluation of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration — provides some important insights into these current questions by examining the effectiveness of the PFS approach at increasing fathers' financial and nonfinancial involvement with their children.

First, in contrast to public perceptions of absent fathers of children receiving welfare, the PFS population — men whose children were receiving AFDC, who were behind in their child support payments, and who were unemployed or underemployed — included men who virtually never saw their children, those who saw their children occasionally, and those who saw their children once a week or more. Clearly, programs working with low-income men need to be prepared to help families move forward from widely varying starting points.

Second, the report presents mixed results on the effects of PFS on fathers' involvement with their children. The program did not increase the amount of visitation between parents and their children, on average, but did lead to an increase in father-child contact in families who were the least involved with one another when the study began, and in sites that began with the lowest levels of visitation. In addition, in families in which the noncustodial parents were assigned to PFS, mothers reported more disagreements with the noncustodial parents, suggesting that fathers did respond to the program by trying to engage in more active parenting than members of the control group (those not assigned to PFS).

Finally, the report corroborates information from smaller-scale studies that even fathers who are behind in their formal support (paid through the child support enforcement system) may provide significant amounts of informal support (provided directly to the mother or child). Moreover, the report indicates that increased pressure to provide formal support may result in some reductions in informal support as fathers (particularly those with very little income or those who were providing substantial amounts of informal support at the outset) struggle to meet competing demands. This tradeoff between formal and informal support is quite important when one realizes that, under TANF, most states do not "pass through" formal support to custodial parents who are on welfare. Instead, they keep formal payments as "reimbursement" for welfare payments made to the mother. Hopefully, the new information provided in this report will spur further investigation into the different roles of informal and formal support in family life and into how increases in enforcement activity may affect the provision of informal support.

The PFS Demonstration has been supported by a group of forward-looking private foundations, federal agencies, and the participating states, which shared a vision that comprehensive welfare reform and antipoverty efforts should encompass both obligations and opportunities for low-income noncustodial fathers. The foundation and federal partners are listed at the front of this report. To them, the participating states and localities, and the staff and participants in each site who worked daily to reach the goals of the program and to support our research efforts, we are deeply grateful.

Judith M. Gueron
President

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This report is part of a final report series on the Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration that represents the culmination of a multi-year partnership at many levels. Those who operated the program in the seven sites supported this study in the most fundamental ways, through their willingness to keep their doors open to field researchers and through all their help in collecting necessary data. To the funders who have supported and been actively involved in this demonstration, all listed at the front of this report, we are deeply grateful as well.

Within MDRC, the report represents the work of a large group of collaborators. The authors would like to thank Gordon Berlin and Fred Doolittle for their thoughtful leadership throughout the PFS Demonstration and during the analysis and writing of this report. Greg Hoerz directed the survey effort at MDRC, with assistance from Gigi Taylor. George Cave played an important role in designing the survey instrument, and Abt Associates conducted the excellent survey tracking and fielding that resulted in unusually high response rates for a difficult-to-survey population. An advisory group including Irwin Garfinkel, Linda Mellgren, Daniel Meyer, and Judith Seltzer reviewed the design of the survey instrument and sampling strategies.

Throughout random assignment, Joel Gordon oversaw this complex enrollment process and managed the processing of data. Frank Yang assisted with random assignment and demographic data. Gaston Murray developed the PFS management information system, continuously refining it throughout the demonstration. Programming of the MIS was done by Maryno Demesier and Juanita Vega-Chetcuti with maintenance support from Igor Leyzerson. Margarita Agudelo collected and coordinated the processing of the administrative records data, with Natasha Piatnitskaia supporting the integration of data into analysis files. Martin Gaynor developed the system for processing child support enforcement data, and Ngan Lee was responsible for scheduling processing and organizing data flow. Charles Daniel, Joyce Dees, Donna George, Marguerite Payne, and Carmen Troche handled random assignment calls and entered data, with supervision from Shirley James.

MDRC colleagues Ute Appenzeller, Judith Greissman, Judith Gueron, Earl Johnson, Cynthia Miller, Marilyn Price, Sharon Rowser, and Evan Weissman provided helpful comments on an earlier draft. The report benefited significantly from a thoughtful review by Judith Seltzer. Useful insights were also provided by Ronald Mincy and participants at the Fatherhood session of Harvard University's Urban Seminar on Children's Health and Safety in April 1999. Kristen Hyatt of the U.S. Department of Agriculture also provided comments on an earlier draft. John Martinez provided comments and fundamentally supported our work by providing crucial data management throughout the analysis. Finally, Kimberly Torres, Jevon Nicholson, and James Schumm provided research assistance at important stages of the work. Bob Weber edited the report, and Stephanie Cowell did the word processing.

The Authors

Chapter 1

Introduction and Summary

The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration was a multi-site national project designed to test a new approach to child support enforcement (CSE) for low-income noncustodial parents. The demonstration phase of the program operated in seven sites — Los Angeles, California; Jacksonville, Florida; Springfield, Massachusetts; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Trenton, New Jersey; Dayton, Ohio; and Memphis, Tennessee — from 1994 to 1996. The demonstration operated within a random assignment design, dividing approximately 5,600 noncustodial parents evenly between a program group that received PFS services and a control group that did not. The demonstration was managed and evaluated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC).

For fathers[1] who were behind in their child support payments because of unemployment, and whose children were receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the program mandated participation in peer discussion groups, provided new employment and training opportunities, and instituted enhanced child support services. Through these services, the program's designers hoped to increase child support payments, improve the fathers' employment and earnings, and increase the fathers' involvement with their children.

Previously published MDRC research about the PFS Demonstration includes a qualitative study of the lives of 32 low-income fathers who enrolled in PFS. *Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood* [2] provides a compelling portrait based on in-depth interviews with men who were struggling to succeed in many aspects of their lives, including their goal of being the kind of parents they would like to be. As quoted below, the relationships that this group of men had with their children varied dramatically.[3] A very small number were full-time, live-in fathers:

> You know, with my son, that's every day, you know? This ain't a weekend thing or where it begins on a weekend or on a Friday, no; this is every day for me, you know. I'm changing Pampers, I'm feeding him, I'm making bottles, I'm doing the regular things that a father suppose to do, that's me . . . so, I ain't trying to get custody, because I have custody. You know what I mean?

At the other extreme were fathers who had no contact at all with their children:

> Somehow, someday, I will have a chance to talk to 'em. . . . And I will be there to say, look, I'm here, I love you. Maybe I've proven otherwise, maybe I did wrong. And if you won't give me another chance, all I want to know — all I want you to know is I'm here to help you, whatever I can do for you. . . . And they'll decide if they'll let me, or they won't. But that's the way it's gotta be. I, I've accepted that.

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[1]The terms "noncustodial fathers" and "noncustodial parents" are used interchangeably in this report because only 2 percent of the noncustodial parents in the PFS sample were women.

[2]Johnson, Levine, and Doolittle, 1999.

[3]The quotes in this section are from Johnson, Levine, and Doolittle, 1999, pages 46, 54, 45, 49, and 44, respectively.

More typical were those who saw their children at least once a month but who frequently faced obstacles in sustaining their relationship with their children:

> In some cases . . . lack of contact with children was the NCP's own choice, in part because he felt financially unable to fulfill the role of father. In other cases . . . the mother took the child and left, failing to inform the father of her whereabouts or denying him access to their child. Some NCPs had to meet certain conditions (formal or informal) in order to see their child(ren). . . . An ex-partner may disallow visits because the father is living with another woman or she has a new man in her life, because he fails to contribute to their household expenses, or for other reasons. In a few cases, the courts banned contact between a father and child(ren). Conditions for visits may become so daunting that noncustodial fathers give up.

Although the fathers started the PFS program at different points in their relationships with their children, is was clear that most were deeply interested in being involved:

> Without my kids, it's like, everything I've done in my life, I've done with a goal and a purpose. My goal and sole purpose in my life right now, right now — and it has been since my kids is born — was to make life better for them than it was for me, you know. . . .

> A lot of us, out of the whole [PFS peer support] class, everybody — there was only two people that did not love their kids and did not want to be with their kids. Two people — and we're talking about [out of] easily fifty people. And they make it seem like we run away from our kids, we have babies and run — it's not like that, man.

In the end, did the PFS program actually help these noncustodial parents to overcome the various roadblocks facing them, so that they could maintain or improve their relationships with their children? Is there any evidence that fathers' attempts to become more involved with their children were accompanied by unintended negative effects, such as increased conflict between the estranged parents?

The first quantitative evidence about the impacts of PFS was presented in 1998, in *Building Opportunities, Enforcing Obligations: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Parents' Fair Share.*[4] That report used formal child support records data and official employer-reported information on wages to provide an interim assessment of the program's effects on child support payments and on fathers' employment and earnings. The major findings from that report are summarized in Section II below.

The current report provides the first evidence of the program's effects on forms of paternal involvement that go beyond "formal" child support (support required by and paid through the CSE system). Impacts examined for the first time include effects on the levels of informal child support that noncustodial parents provided, on the quantity and quality of the fathers' involvement in parenting, and on the levels of conflict between custodial and noncustodial parents. In

[4]Doolittle et al., 1998.

addition to estimating the *effects of PFS* on these outcomes, the report also provides important *descriptive information* about the relative importance of formal and informal child support, patterns of involvement in parenting, and levels of parental conflict for an understudied group — very low-income noncustodial parents — as represented by those parents who were members of the PFS sample.

The current report draws primarily on the survey responses of 2,005 custodial parents who were the mothers of the children for whom these noncustodial parents owed child support. The survey sample includes custodial parents who were named in the child support cases of noncustodial parents who had been randomly assigned either to a program group, subject to mandatory participation in PFS, or to a control group that was not eligible for PFS services. The noncustodial parents associated with the custodial parents in the survey sample were randomly assigned between March 1995 and March 1996,[5] and the survey was conducted approximately 12 months after the month of random assignment.

Most survey questions discussed in this report asked about the noncustodial parents' behavior in the six-month period immediately preceding the survey date, that is, approximately 7 to 12 months after random assignment. This period was chosen to capture the period immediately following program participation, which typically lasted for five months.

I. Summary of Key Findings Presented in This Report

- **The low-income noncustodial parents targeted by the Parents' Fair Share program had widely varying levels of involvement with their children even in the absence of the program.**

A strikingly high fraction of noncustodial fathers in the control group — nearly one-third — saw their children at least once a week during the six months prior to the follow-up survey. Another 40 percent of the sample saw their children at least once during that six months but not as often as once a week. The remaining 30 percent of fathers, however, did not see their children at all in the six months leading up to the follow-up survey. (These proportions are estimated using the reports of custodial parents; the reports of noncustodial parents result in somewhat higher estimated rates of contact.)

While these significant visitation levels are important to understand for developing policies and programs for similar populations, this population may have somewhat higher levels of contact than would a national sample of similarly disadvantaged noncustodial fathers. The PFS sample was constrained to parents who had a child support order in place, who had shown up at a recent child support hearing, and who lived in the same county as their children.

- **Noncustodial parents in the PFS program group were more likely to provide formal child support (support paid through the CSE system) than**

[5]For the full PFS sample of approximately 5,600 noncustodial parents, random assignment occurred between March 1994 and June 1996.

members of the control group, during the six-month follow-up period for this report.

As previously reported for an earlier cohort and a longer (18-month) follow-up period in the 1998 interim report, PFS did increase the proportion of noncustodial parents who provided any formal child support for the six-month survey follow-up period used in this report. The increase in the provision of formal support occurred across most subgroups of the PFS survey sample.

The current report also finds that the program produced a small increase in the average amount of formal child support paid over the six-month follow-up period covered by this report. However, this increase in the average amount paid was not found in the 1998 report and does not hold true for the full PFS sample. (The cohort from which the survey sample was drawn had somewhat larger impacts on formal child support than experienced by other PFS sample members.)

- **PFS did not change the likelihood that noncustodial parents would provide any informal support (support provided directly to custodial parents). However, the program did lead to a small reduction in the average *value* of informal support given during the follow-up period.**

Noncustodial parents were keenly aware that they faced a choice between providing formal child support, which gave them credit toward meeting their official child support obligation, and providing "under the table" or informal support, which did not. One reason they chose to provide the latter type of support is that during the PFS Demonstration, when a custodial parent was receiving AFDC, most state CSE systems "passed through" to the custodial parent only the first $50 of formal child support paid in a given month. Any amount over $50 was retained by the CSE system as repayment for the family's public assistance benefits. In contrast, all informal contributions would directly increase the income available to the child.

One concern about increasing the enforcement of formal child support for low-income noncustodial fathers is that they may begin to reduce their informal contributions in order to meet their formal obligation. In fact, if a noncustodial parent reacted to the increased pressure under PFS to make formal child support payments by decreasing the amount of informal support he provided by an equivalent amount, in theory the custodial parent could have actually ended up worse off financially as a result of the program. However, as measured in this report, PFS neither increased nor decreased the amount of total support available to custodial parents, when both formal and informal payments are taken into account.

Interestingly, the reductions in the amount of informal contributions that were observed often occurred for completely different subgroups, and in different PFS sites, than experienced increases in the value of formal payments, suggesting that reductions in informal payments are not an inevitable reaction to increases in formal payments.

- **An analysis of PFS impacts by subgroup suggests that future programs can reduce the likelihood that noncustodial parents will cut back on their informal contributions by taking two steps: increasing the earnings capacity of the most disadvantaged noncustodial parents and developing**

innovative ways to encourage fathers to maintain informal support if they are already providing it at a high level.

Two groups that showed consistent reductions in informal payments were noncustodial parents who had no evidence of employment in the nine months before entering the program and those who were highly involved and already providing high levels of informal support at the outset of the program.[6] Because fathers with higher earnings did *not* react to PFS by decreasing their informal contributions, an intervention that improves the earnings of the most disadvantaged noncustodial parents more substantially than did PFS is likely to help them to maintain their informal support. Families would also benefit from programs' efforts to recognize, and provide distinct assistance to, fathers who are already contributing substantial levels of informal support.

- **PFS did not, on average, lead to increases in the amount of contact that fathers had with their children. However, site-by-site analyses indicate that PFS was effective at increasing the occurrence of regular visits when it served families who were in a position to respond — those with relatively low visitation rates.**

The two PFS sites in which noncustodial parents in the control group had the lowest reported visitation rates did produce increases in the likelihood that noncustodial parents would visit their children at least monthly.[7] This suggests that while the PFS model might be improved upon by adding legal assistance or other services for the noncustodial parents, the model as implemented was effective at increasing the frequency of father-child contact when targeted to families whose level of involvement had significant room for improvement.

- **PFS did seem to increase fathers' efforts to engage in active parenting, as evidenced by a small increase in mother's reports of frequent disagreements between the parents. Although disagreements increased, the program did not lead to increases in levels of "aggressive conflict" between the parents.[8]**

The small overall increase in frequency of disagreements is actually concentrated within the two sites whose noncustodial parents began the demonstration with the highest levels of visitation. These two sites experienced a substantial increase in disagreements. The level of visitation in these sites did not increase; moreover, the disagreements that increased tended to be about topics of child-rearing, rather than about visitation or child support. Thus, the increase in disagreements appears to occur because of noncustodial parents' efforts to engage in more active parenting, not because of visitation conflicts. It seems reasonable that increased engagement in

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[6]This group includes fathers with the youngest children, fathers with high levels of involvement, and younger fathers.

[7]Moreover, the subgroup of noncustodial parents who had very low levels of involvement at the outset of the program was one of only two subgroups examined that showed increases in the likelihood that any informal contributions would be made. It had near-statistically significant increases in visitation as well.

[8]"Aggressive conflict" is identified if the custodial parent reported that she and the noncustodial father had disagreements and "very often or always" reacted by arguing loudly or shouting at each other, or "ever" reacted by hitting or throwing things at each other.

parenting will cause increased disagreements, since there are now two parents involved in decision-making. However, it is also possible that the increase in disagreements occurs specifically because the custodial parents are resisting the noncustodial parents' new parenting efforts.

Although the increase in disagreements is interpreted here as a positive sign that noncustodial parents were becoming more engaged in parenting, these findings, combined with the difficulties PFS staff faced in convincing families to use the formal mediation component, should also challenge program staff to be prepared to help families keep this increased engagement on a positive, productive track. An increase in disagreements might arise not only among parents who are trying to increase contact with their children — a group for which staff might have expected some increase in conflict — but also, perhaps even more commonly, among parents who were already visiting fairly frequently.[9]

- **PFS showed some promising effects by increasing the frequency of discussions about the child among parents with the youngest children and by increasing the likelihood of visits for noncustodial parents who had no high school credential. However, the results for these two subgroups also raise the possibility that, for some families, increased engagement in parenting by the noncustodial parent can increase the occurrence of aggressive conflict between the parents.**

For families with the youngest children (whose parents had presumably separated relatively recently), PFS led to an increase in the likelihood that the parents discussed the child at least monthly, suggesting that the parents with the youngest children were particularly amenable to increases in the noncustodial parent's engagement in parenting. For noncustodial parents who had no high school credential, PFS led to an increase in the likelihood of any contact between father and child over the follow-up period, indicating that the information provided by PFS about the CSE system may have had important effects for the parents who had the least knowledge at the outset.

These impacts are particularly encouraging because neither the sample as a whole nor any other subgroups examined showed impacts on parental discussions of the child or on the likelihood that any contact occurred. However, both of these positive responses were also accompanied by increases in the occurrence of aggressive conflict between the parents, and these are the only subgroups that showed any increase in this type of conflict. Thus, even though PFS as a whole did not increase the likelihood of domestic violence, those who design and implement future interventions should be aware that, for a small group of families, there is a chance that programs could increase that risk.

- **Informal support and nonfinancial involvement must be understood as exchanges that are distinct from the provision of formal child support.**

[9]Interestingly, disagreements did not increase for the subgroup with the highest levels of involvement — noncustodial parents who visited their children at least weekly at baseline (random assignment) *and* whose custodial counterpart reported that her relationship with the father was "friendly."

Little of the previous literature on child support and its connections with fathers' visitation and children's well-being has made a clear distinction between formal child support and informal contributions. Yet it is clear from the preceding summary of findings that future interventions will benefit from careful strategizing about how they will handle families who enter the program with different levels of involvement across different domains.

The patterns of involvement exhibited by the PFS control group suggest that levels of informal child support and nonfinancial involvement are closely related to each other. For many subgroups the program had effects on informal support without affecting measures of nonfinancial involvement, and vice versa. The connections between formal support and informal support are similarly complicated. Developing a deeper understanding of the connections between formal support, informal financial support, and other forms of involvement will be critical to ensuring that policy interventions support fathers' involvement in all its forms.

II. The Parent's Fair Share Demonstration[10]

A. The Program

PFS was created to address a set of social and economic trends that make it both crucial to collect child support for children receiving welfare, when possible, and difficult to do so. These interrelated trends include (1) welfare reform efforts aimed at shifting responsibility for supporting poor children away from the public sector and toward both parents, increasing the need for single parents to gain income from noncustodial parents; (2) child support reforms which had largely focused on noncustodial parents with known income or assets and were thus ineffective for many low-income families; and (3) the deteriorating labor market situation of less educated men, which has only recently shown some sign of improvement.

In the seven PFS sites, a new set of rules and services was developed. In exchange for cooperation with the child support enforcement (CSE) system, a partnership of local organizations offered fathers services designed to help them find more stable and better-paying jobs, pay child support on a consistent basis, and assume a fuller and more responsible parental role. The 1998 interim report (Doolittle et al., 1998) provides information about the program's impacts on employment, earnings, and child support payments made through the formal child support system. This current report provides the first evidence of how PFS affected "informal" child support payments that noncustodial parents made directly to custodial parents and of how well the program met its third goal — encouraging noncustodial parents to become more involved in their children's lives.

Noncustodial parents were eligible for PFS if they had a child support order in place, if they were behind in their child support payments, if they were unemployed or underemployed (in a very low-wage or unstable job), and if their child was receiving AFDC (or, in some sites, had at least received AFDC previously, with arrears still owed). Sites combed their caseloads to identify noncustodial parents who were potentially eligible and called them in for a hearing regarding their nonpayment of support. Those who showed up for the hearing and were found eligible for

[10]This introduction draws heavily on the Executive Summary of Doolittle et al., 1998.

PFS were then randomly assigned to the program group (required to attend PFS services) or a control group (subject to regular CSE practices).

Among the key services provided were peer support (focused on issues of responsible parenting), employment and training services, and an offer of voluntary mediation between the custodial and noncustodial parents. During the period in which parents participated in PFS services, the CSE system gave them an incentive to invest in themselves by temporarily lowering their current obligation to pay support. When a parent found employment, CSE staff were to act quickly to raise the support order to an appropriate level, and if a parent ceased to cooperate with PFS program requirements, CSE staff were to act quickly to enforce the pre-PFS child support obligation. The demonstration was a test of the feasibility of implementing this new "bargain" and its effects on parents, children, and the CSE system. (See Figure 1.1 for a more complete description of the program's components.)

As described in more detail later, two of the program's components — peer support and mediation — were designed specifically to affect family relationships and fathers' involvement with their children. Other components might have effects on fathers' involvement as well, in less direct ways. Enhanced CSE might affect informal payments and other types of fathers' involvement indirectly, by increasing the pressure on fathers to make formal child support payments. Employment and training services might increase a father's income, in turn potentially affecting his capacity to pay child support, changing his sense of himself as a father, increasing his interest in visiting with his children, or increasing the willingness of the custodial parent to allow the children to visit with him.

Although PFS was designed before Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) replaced the AFDC system, the issues it is designed to address remain. In fact, because single-parent families now face time limits and other constraints on welfare receipt, CSE has gained increased attention as a way to gain financial support for children. Such efforts, while gaining some additional income for single-parent families, also have the potential for introducing new tensions into already complex family relationships, making the effects of PFS on family relationships of particular interest. Moreover, in response to a growing sense that public policy has attended to the financial but not to the positive emotional role that nonresident fathers can play in their children's lives, there has been a growing interest in policies that seek proactively to increase the access of nonresident fathers to their children.

B. Effects of PFS Presented in Other MDRC Reports

The interim report (Doolittle et al., 1998) discusses the program's implementation and particularly the challenges involved in coordinating services — among community-based organizations, employment and training providers, and the CSE system — for a diverse population of disadvantaged men. It also describes the characteristics of these men and assesses the effects of the program on their formal child support payments and earnings. In addition, a companion report (Martinez and Miller, 2000) released along with this one presents findings on the effects of PFS on noncustodial parents' earnings, drawing on data from the noncustodial parent survey. Findings from both the 1998 interim report and the companion report are discussed below.

Figure 1.1
Parents' Fair Share

Core Components of the PFS Program Model

- **Peer support.** The purpose of this component was to inform participants about their rights and obligations as noncustodial parents, to encourage positive parental behavior and sexual responsibility, to strengthen participants' commitment to work, and to enhance participants' life skills. The component was built around a curriculum, known as Responsible Fatherhood, that was supplied by MDRC. The groups also could have included recreational activities, "mentoring" arrangements using successful PFS graduates, or planned parent-child activities.

- **Employment and training.** The goal of these activities was to help participants secure long-term, stable employment at a wage level that would allow them to support themselves and their children. Sites were strongly encouraged to offer a variety of services, including job search assistance and opportunities for education and skills training. In addition, since it was important to engage participants in income-producing activities quickly to establish the practice of paying child support, sites were encouraged to offer opportunities for on-the-job training, paid work experience, and other activities that mix skills training or education with part-time employment.

- **Enhanced child support enforcement.** One objective of PFS was to increase support payments made on behalf of children living in single-parent welfare households. Although a legal and administrative structure already existed to establish and enforce child support obligations, demonstration sites were asked to develop new procedures, services, and incentives in this area. These included steps to expedite the modification of child support awards and/or flexible rules that allowed child support orders to be reduced while noncustodial parents participated in PFS and special monitoring of the status of PFS cases.

- **Mediation.** Often disagreements between custodial and noncustodial parents about visitation, household expenditures, lifestyles, child care, and school arrangements — and the roles and actions of other adults in their children's lives — influence child support payments and other forms of paternal involvement. Thus, demonstration sites had to provide opportunities for parents to mediate their differences using services modeled on those now provided through many family courts in divorce cases.

The majority of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS were living in poverty, or on the edge of poverty, and had a recent history of moving from one low-wage job to another. Thus, the challenge was to help these fathers find better jobs than they would otherwise have found or to secure more stable employment. Many faced substantial barriers to moving into better jobs in the mainstream labor market: Nearly 50 percent lacked a high school diploma, and about 70 percent had been arrested for an offense unrelated to child support.

Over an 18-month follow-up period, slightly more than two-thirds of the noncustodial parents participated in at least one PFS activity. The average participant was active for five months. Participation was greatest in peer support — typically the initial component offered — and in job search workshops; on average, about 64 percent participated in peer support, and 57 percent participated in job search.

Peer support was judged by field researchers to be the component most effectively implemented. It generally succeeding in engaging the fathers and providing them a place to talk through, and get advice about, a range of issues related to being a noncustodial parent. Peer support groups generally met a minimum of two or three times a week for a set number of weeks to cover all the topics in the Responsible Fatherhood curriculum. (See Table 1.1.) Most peer support facilitators closely followed the curriculum, which was designed to help noncustodial fathers to set personal goals and resolve some of their family conflicts, and to motivate them to want to provide both emotional and financial support to their children. In addition, it was expected that peer support would provide the noncustodial parents with conflict resolution skills that might help them to retain jobs.

In contrast, mediation was used very little; participation rates in formal mediation exceeded 5 percent in only one site. Staff reported that it was difficult to interest both the noncustodial and the custodial parents in mediation, although when some sites focused a great deal of attention on "marketing" mediation, activity levels temporarily increased. Staff did, however, report playing an informal mediation role more often.[11]

Impact results indicate that PFS did increase the payment of formal child support. Parents who were referred to PFS services and subject to its mandates were more likely to pay child support through the CSE system than those who remained in a control group. Across all seven sites combined, the proportion of parents who paid support during the follow-up quarters increased by about 4.5 to 7.5 percentage points. However, the amount of child support paid over the 18 months increased by a statistically significant amount in only two sites.

The 1998 interim report, drawing only on earnings data from the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system in each state, found that these increases in the provision of child support came without a corresponding increase in fathers' employment and earnings. No site produced increases in employment and earnings that were consistent and statistically significant during the 18 months of follow-up for this interim report. Most sites found it difficult to develop skill-building employment and training activities and relied heavily on job search services instead. These services may not have been able to help participants find much better jobs, or retain jobs

[11]Voluntary mediation instigated by staff on behalf of noncustodial parents with visitation problems has been found to elicit low response from custodial parents in other studies as well. See Pearson and Thoennes, 1998.

Table 1.1
Parents' Fair Share

Topics in the PFS Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum

1. Introduction to Responsible Fatherhood
2. What Are My Values?
3. Boys to Men: Experiencing Manhood
4. The Art of Communication
5. Fathers as Providers
6. Noncustodial Fathers: Rights and Responsibilities
7. Developing Values in Children
8. Coping as a Single Father
9. Dealing with Children's Behaviors
10. Relationships: Being a Friend, Partner, Parent, and Employee
11. Understanding Male-Female Relationships
12. Managing Conflict and Handling Anger
13. Handling Anger and Conflict on the Job
14. Surviving on the Job
15. The Issue of Race/Racism
16. Taking Care of Business
17. Managing Your Time and Money
18. Building a Support Network: Who's on Your Side?
19. Alcohol and Drug Use and Abuse[a]
20. Healthful Eating[a]

SOURCE: Hayes, with Sherwood, 2000.

NOTE: [a]These sessions were optional during the PFS evaluation period.

longer, than they would have on their own, and thus did not appear to help them attain higher earnings than the control group. In addition, some fathers probably needed a more intensive set of services to succeed in the labor market; participants and staff reported barriers to employment that included prior convictions, homelessness or housing difficulties, and substance use.[12]

However, the newest evidence from the noncustodial parent survey indicates that PFS had more positive effects on employment and earnings than previously reported. These positive effects are concentrated among the most disadvantaged men in the sample. A careful comparison of impacts as measured by the two data sources suggests that while the program generally had few effects on employment and earnings as reported to the UI system, it did have positive effects on earnings from jobs, perhaps in the "cash" economy, that were reported by noncustodial parents on the survey. It makes sense that this discrepancy in impacts by data source would arise for the most disadvantaged men, since they were probably the most likely to hold the informal "cash" jobs that would not appear in the UI system's records.

III. Primary Research Questions: PFS and Fathers' Involvement

At the most fundamental level, PFS was designed to increase noncustodial parents' capacity and willingness to support their children. Part of the strategy for achieving that goal was to encourage the fathers to become active, involved parents and to support their efforts to do so. The current report provides the first evidence of the effects of PFS on a wide range of measures of noncustodial parents' involvement in their children's lives. We consider fathers' involvement broadly to include:

- "formal" child support payments (payments made through the CSE system)[13]
- "informal" child support (cash payments or in-kind gifts given directly by the noncustodial parent to the custodial parent or the child)
- frequency of contact between the noncustodial parent and the child
- frequency of contact and degree of conflict between the noncustodial parent and the custodial parent
- other measures of active involvement in parenting by the noncustodial parent

The primary goal of this report is to assess the success of PFS at increasing the involvement of noncustodial fathers with their children. We hope also to add to existing research on fathers' involvement by describing the preexisting levels of involvement for this sample of low-

[12]Interviews with staff and job developers indicated that even casual use of drugs caused significant problems for noncustodial parents applying for jobs, because drug screening has become a common part of the application process for low-level jobs.

[13]For custodial parents who were receiving AFDC in a given month, the first $50 of these "formal payments" would be passed through the CSE system to the mother, in all sites except Tennessee. In Tennessee, payments were passed through to custodial parents on AFDC, up to the difference between the AFDC maximum grant and the state-established "standard of need." In all sites, for custodial parents who were off welfare, the full amount of the formal payment would generally be passed through to the mother, up to the amount of the child support order. Any amount in excess of the award would be applied toward arrears owed to the state or the mother.

income noncustodial parents and by offering new insights into the relationships among different types of involvement. For this group of low-income (usually unemployed) fathers who had not been meeting their formal child support obligations, what levels and types of involvement did we observe? To what extent did PFS increase these types of involvement? For what types of families did this kind of intervention seem to be particularly helpful, and for whom did it have little effect? How did formal payments, informal financial support, and nonfinancial forms of involvement appear to be related to one another?

Note that although increasing formal child support payments was a major goal of PFS, this report is not the primary "document of record" concerning the impacts of PFS on formal payments. The 1998 MDRC report examined the effects of PFS on formal child support payments for the first half of the research sample, over an 18-month follow-up period, and a final impact analysis will assess the program's effects on formal payments for the full sample. The results for formal support are presented here for a much narrower time period — the same six-month time period in which informal payments were measured — to allow comparisons between the program's effects on formal payments and other forms of involvement. Moreover, to maintain a consistent sample across the measures of involvement reported here, the estimates of formal support represent a narrower sample than that used in other reports.[14]

As described above and summarized in Figure 1.2, previous research and the goals of the intervention lead to five main questions about patterns of involvement by low-income fathers and the effects of PFS on their involvement:

1. What levels of informal child support, father-child contact, father-mother conflict, and other parenting measures were observed for the PFS population, in the absence of the program?

Estimates of involvement for the PFS control group provide evidence of how this population of noncustodial parents interacted with their children in the absence of the PFS intervention. Because national surveys typically undercount low-income minority noncustodial parents, these estimates are of value not only for aiding in the interpretation of the PFS results but also for adding to our understanding of the relationships that such men typically have with their children.

More is known about average levels of father-child contact and father-mother conflict among divorced or never-married families nationally, allowing us to compare estimates for the broad population of noncustodial fathers with the levels estimated for the PFS sample.

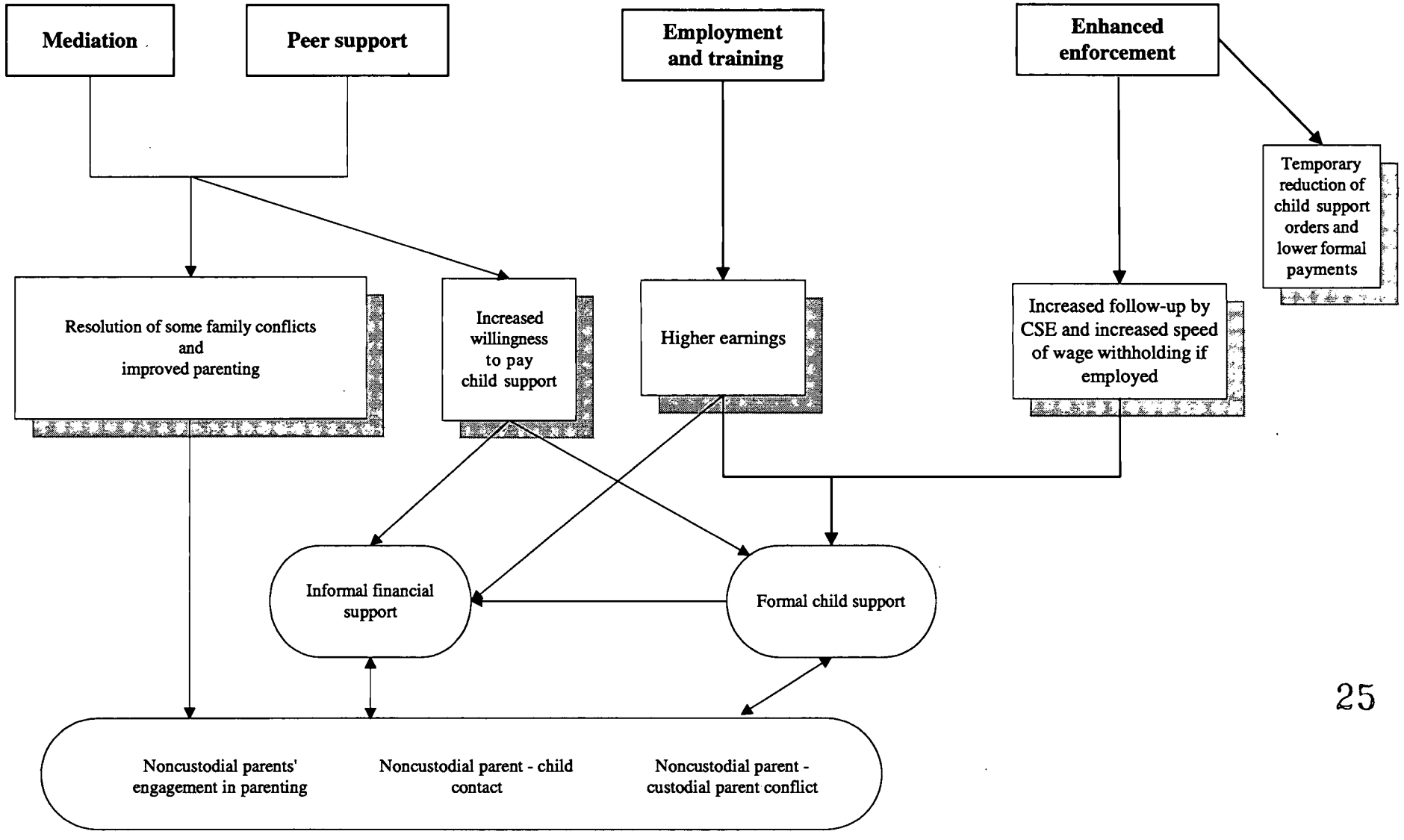
2. How did PFS affect the levels of informal child support provided?

PFS could have plausibly either increased or decreased informal contributions, which we define as either cash or in-kind support provided directly by the noncustodial parent to the custodial parent.

[14]The sample analyzed in this report consists primarily of the respondents to the custodial parent follow-up survey (explained in more detail later).

Figure 1.2
Parents' Fair Share

Hypothesized Effects of PFS on
Child Support Payments and Family Relationships



Potential increases in informal support due to peer support discussions or increased earnings. It was possible that PFS could increase the amount of informal and in-kind support that noncustodial parents provided. For example, peer support discussions could have had positive effects on father-child contact or parental conflict, providing fathers with more opportunity or inclination to support the family financially; staff explanations of the benefits of providing financial support to one's children could have affected not only formal but informal support; or the program could have increased noncustodial parents' earnings, giving them more capacity to contribute financially. At the same time, increases in informal support seemed less likely than increases in formal support, since the program design was primarily aimed at increasing formal support. Staff specifically emphasized the advantages of meeting one's legal obligations (or at least of demonstrating some effort in that direction), and the goal of enhanced enforcement was to increase the collection of formal support.

Potential decreases in informal support due to tradeoffs with formal support. In fact, to the extent that noncustodial parents have a fixed budget for child support, any increase in formal payments could, in the worst-case scenario, lead to an equivalent *decrease* in informal support — fathers may simply shift from informal to formal payments to keep the CSE system satisfied. (Although the program's employment and training services were aimed at raising the father's incomes, which would allow them to increase *both* formal and informal payments rather than substituting one for the other, the program had limited success at increasing the men's earnings.)

A shift from informal to formal payments may appear at first glance a neutral response on net, until one considers the distributional effects of such a shift. Since most custodial parents who were associated with the PFS sample were on AFDC for at least part of the follow-up period, they were eligible for only $50 per month of any child support paid through the formal child support system.[15] The remainder was kept by the state as reimbursement for the AFDC benefits that the child was receiving. After the first $50 per month, a shift from informal to formal payments would shift child support money from the custodial family to the state. Thus, even if PFS increased a noncustodial parent's formal child support payments, it would have been possible for the income of the custodial family to remain the same as without PFS, or even to be reduced. One goal of this report is to assess, to the extent possible, how the program ultimately affected the support received by custodial parents and their children.

3. How did PFS affect the relationships between noncustodial parents and their children?

In the PFS follow-up surveys, the nonfinancial relationships between noncustodial parents and their children are represented by father-child contact, fathers' level of involvement in child-rearing decisions, the frequency of discussions about the child between father and mother, and other parenting measures. Previous survey research on the relationship between noncustodial parents and their children has often focused on the determinants of father-child contact, although the results of that literature can also provide hypotheses about the possible effects of PFS on other measures of parenting.

Potential increases in contact due to peer support discussions. As shown in Figure 1.2, the most direct way in which PFS could have affected the amount of contact between the noncustodial parent and the child was through peer support discussions and mediation efforts. In

[15]At the 12-month follow-up point, nearly 60 percent of the custodial parents were still on welfare.

general, increased involvement between absent fathers and their children is regarded as both fair for fathers and likely to be beneficial for children.[16] Thus, PFS peer support discussions sought to promote increased parental involvement, both by educating noncustodial fathers about the benefits they could provide to their children and by providing concrete advice about how to resolve issues that may have prevented them from becoming more involved in the past. In at least one site, peer support facilitators assigned "homework," such as making dinner for the child, and offered periodic father-child events on-site. Some sites also invited guest speakers to come to peer support sessions to describe for noncustodial parents their legal rights concerning visitation or child support issues, and the fathers expressed a great deal of interest in this information. In addition, it was hoped that offering mediation would give noncustodial fathers a way to resolve some disputes that might prevent access to their children.

At the time that PFS was designed, there was little evidence about whether peer support discussions or mediation would be likely to succeed at increasing fathers' contact with their children. However, since then, experimental and nonexperimental evidence has begun to suggest that interventions are more likely to be more successful at increasing nonresident fathers' access to their children soon after a divorce or separation than when conflict has become entrenched. This suggests that it might have been difficult to bring about changes in visitation for families in PFS, who typically already had a history of nonpayment at the time of random assignment.

Most directly applicable are recent evaluations of two large-scale demonstration projects — the State Justice Institute (SJI) Evaluation and the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) Child Access Demonstrations — which focused on the effectiveness of programs that used mediation, education, counseling, and monitoring to improve parental relationships and child access. Although the sample members for these programs were not restricted to noncustodial parents who owed child support for children on welfare and who typically entered the interventions with very high levels of conflict and visitation disputes, the results provide some of the only rigorous information available about the success of interventions aimed at increasing contact between nonresident fathers and their children.

As summarized by Pearson and Thoennes (1998), these studies found that improving access was in many cases very difficult. The interventions were most successful for families with relatively new divorces or with relatively simple conflicts, such as scheduling disputes. Fathers in the program groups who fell into these categories experienced an increase in the frequency and amount of contact with their children. Conversely, fathers with longer, more intense disputes did not report any increase in contact. This evidence from recent interventions suggests that the ability of PFS to improve levels of father-child contact may have depended on how long-standing the parents' separation had been and how contentious their relationship was.

Potential increases in contact due to increased child support. As shown in Figure 1.2, PFS could also have increased contact indirectly, by increasing the likelihood that a noncustodial father would pay formal or informal child support. Most descriptive analyses using national surveys have found that fathers who pay support are more likely to have other types of contact with

[16]The conventional wisdom, based in part on small-sample clinical studies, has been that increased involvement with nonresident fathers is beneficial for children. However, analyses using national survey data have found mixed evidence.

their children (Furstenberg et al., 1983; Seltzer, Schaeffer, and Charng, 1989; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Seltzer, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1998; but see Venum, 1993). In addition, there is some evidence that when increased enforcement leads fathers to pay support, it increases their level of influence over child-rearing and perhaps over the frequency of visits (Seltzer, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1998).

However, some evidence suggests that increasing formal payments alone is unlikely to bring about major changes in visitation. First, although child support and visitation problems are typically correlated, Pearson and Thoennes (1998) indicate that access disputes typically go well beyond economic and child support issues and are instead often rooted in problematic relationships between the parents. In fact, fewer than one-fifth of both mothers and fathers in these studies cited child support as the source of visitation problems.

Second, Seltzer has recently provided evidence showing that for families who have separated some years previously, changes in child support payments bring about only small changes in frequency of visits (Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988; Seltzer, 1988, 2000). She interprets this to suggest that while existing policies toward payment of support may influence families' visitation patterns soon after separation, changes in payments that occur later may produce less alteration because parents have already established patterns of interaction.

Potential reductions in contact due to reductions in informal support. Finally, it was possible that PFS could *reduce* the level of father-child contact if it caused a reduction in the informal payments, which, according to some ethnographic work, can facilitate the access of low-income nonresident fathers to their children.[17] Past survey research on the connection between father-child contact and child support payments does not generally distinguish between formal and informal child support payments, making it difficult to assess causal links between the provision of informal support and visitation. However, evidence from an Atlanta welfare sample does suggest that visitation is much more closely correlated with the provision of informal than formal support (Greene and Moore, 1996).

4. How did PFS affect levels of conflict between noncustodial and custodial parents?

As was true for informal contributions and for levels of contact between noncustodial parents and their children, PFS could have conceivably either increased or reduced the amount of parental conflict that was witnessed by children.

Potential increases in conflict due to increased contact, increased engagement in parenting, or changes in child support. PFS could have led to increased conflict between the parents for a number of reasons. First, an increase in contact between father and child could also have increased the contact between parents who already had a turbulent relationship, leading to increased parental conflict (Hess and Camara, 1979; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Moreover, conflict between parents could have increased even without an increase in father-child contact. For example, the cajoling of peer support leaders could have led fathers to try to engage more actively in child-rearing decisions, which could have led to conflict either simply because collaboration engendered disagreement or because the custodial parent specifically resisted the father's attempts to

[17]Edin, 1995.

increase his role. In addition, if noncustodial fathers increased their formal child support payments, conflict may have arisen if they felt entitled to more involvement in decision-making but custodial parents (who received less than the total amount the fathers paid) did not see such a connection; mothers may also have been angered if fathers shifted previously informal payments toward formal ones.[18]

Potential reductions in conflict due to mediation and discussions of conflict resolution. In addition, the PFS designers also hoped that active efforts to *reduce* conflict between the parents could help to increase the noncustodial parent's likelihood of paying support and of becoming more involved with his children in other ways. Thus, a particular concern for those implementing PFS was to try to reduce — or at least prevent the program from exacerbating — conflict between the parents. To accomplish this goal, peer support frequently included discussions of differences that arise between noncustodial and custodial parents as well as more general discussions of conflict resolution. Noncustodial parents were also offered mediation services, although informal mediation by staff was reportedly more common than the formal services, which were seldom used.

Note that, at times, the report uses the patterns of observed impacts to draw inferences about how formal support, informal support, contact, and conflict are (or are not) potentially related in the PFS sample. However, a systematic analysis of these relationships is beyond the scope of the report. For example, the report presents the total effect of PFS on conflict, without attempting to disentangle the program's direct effects on conflict (for example, through conflict resolution discussions or mediation) from its indirect effects (for example, through increased child support payments).

5. Did PFS affect families differently, depending on their economic circumstances and their noneconomic characteristics?

To help program operators and policymakers design and target interventions as effectively as possible in the future, it is important to understand whether particular characteristics of noncustodial parents, custodial parents, or families facilitated or impeded the effectiveness of the program. As a first examination of this question, results are presented for subgroups that may have differed from the full sample in their capacity to respond to PFS.

As the previous discussion suggests, it is our hope that this report not only will provide information about how PFS affected families in this demonstration but also will add to our general knowledge about whether, and how, child support policies or other interventions can be expected to affect the involvement of noncustodial parents in their children's lives. Some previous nonexperimental analyses have examined the possible effects of increased CSE on fathers' con-

[18]In national samples with wider income ranges, the relationship between payment of child support and conflict has been complex, with some correlational studies showing that payment of child support is associated with less conflict and other studies showing that *nonpayors* experience less conflict, perhaps because the parents completely avoided each other (Seltzer, 1991; Seltzer, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1998). Two recent studies have used instrumental variables analysis to try to understand the effects of enforcement-induced increases in child support on family conflict. One analysis suggested that CSE may decrease conflict for divorced parents but increase conflict for those who were never married (although effects were not statistically significant) (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Another found varying results on the relationship between payments and conflict, depending on the sample and methods used (Seltzer, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1998).

tact with their children and on fathers' levels of conflict with the custodial parents — both outcomes that clinical studies of divorced families have suggested could be important determinants of how well a child fares in a single-parent family. However, few of these studies have focused specifically on low-income fathers or fathers of children on welfare. In fact, until very recently, most studies on contact and conflict between noncustodial parents and children relied on clinical samples of middle-class divorced families or on national samples that underrepresented poor, minority fathers.

As others have suggested, it seems plausible that the effects of increased CSE (or interventions such as PFS services) on outcomes of great importance to children such as father-child contact and mother-father conflict may differ for low-income families or for children born of nonmarried couples, since the expectations of nonresident fathers and the enforcement context differ significantly for divorced and never-married families (see Seltzer, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1998). This heightens the already considerable need for knowledge about fragile families who receive welfare or are poor, a group that is currently receiving considerable attention in the arenas of welfare reform and CSE.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. Chapter 2 describes the data sources and outcome measures in more detail and describes the characteristics of the samples compared with national samples. Chapter 3 presents the impacts of PFS on fathers' financial and nonfinancial involvement. Chapter 4 examines whether PFS had more positive or negative results for particular types of families or in particular sites. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the findings and policy implications.

Chapter 2

Data Sources, Outcome Measures, and Samples

I. Data Sources

Data used in the analysis for this report are drawn primarily from a survey of custodial parents who are associated with noncustodial parents in the Parents' Fair Share (PFS) research sample (members of both the program and the control groups). The report draws on several data sources in addition to the custodial parent survey. These include child support enforcement (CSE) payment records, a PFS Background Information Form (BIF), and a survey of noncustodial parents in the sample. Following is a short description of each data source.

A. Custodial Parent Survey

Survey design. The custodial parent survey was designed to collect information on the effects of PFS, including receipt of formal and informal child support payments, noncustodial parents' contact with a focal child, and relationships between the custodial and noncustodial parents. It also provides basic information about the custodial parents' age, race, educational attainment, labor force participation, and household living situations.

The custodial parent survey was designed to occur approximately 12 months after the associated noncustodial parent was randomly assigned; the majority of interviews (85 percent) took place between month 12 and month 14.

The custodial parent survey sample consists of one custodial parent for each noncustodial parent, even though noncustodial parents may have had multiple child support cases. The custodial parent who was surveyed was the parent of the noncustodial parent's youngest child receiving AFDC. The youngest child was also the focal child for any questions that asked the custodial parent about the noncustodial parent's relationship with a particular child.

Survey response. The overall response rate for the custodial parent survey was 90.2 percent of the fielded sample and was equal for both the program and the control groups. The survey was conducted by telephone for slightly more than half of the custodial parents; the remainder were interviewed in person.

Appendix Table A provides a comparison of PFS impacts on formal child support, employment, and earnings (measured by using CSE records and employers' reports to the UI system of wages paid) for four groups: the *full PFS sample*; the cohort of PFS sample members whose random assignment dates were within the "window" for survey eligibility (*survey eligibles*); the random group of survey eligibles for whom surveys were actually fielded (the *fielded sample*); and *survey respondents*. There are two major conclusions from this analysis:

- The high response rate for the survey had the desired result; there is little difference (using administrative records data) between program impacts for survey respondents and the larger cohort from which they were sampled.

- The fielded sample experienced a statistically significant impact on the average amount of formal child support paid, while neither the cohort of survey eligibles from which the fielded sample was drawn nor the full PFS sample experienced this impact. This impact on average payments is primarily driven by unusually large impacts in follow-up months 7-12 for the fielded sample in one site — Los Angeles. Because this result is heavily influenced by the results for one site, and because the fielded sample in Los Angeles had larger impacts in months 7-12 of follow-up than any other cohort in Los Angeles (including those who were randomly assigned earlier as well as those who were randomly assigned later), this finding of increased formal payments should not be considered particularly robust.

B. Noncustodial Parent Survey

Some analyses draw on the noncustodial parent survey, a longer interview designed for a smaller sample than the custodial parent survey. A total of 553 noncustodial parents responded, for a response rate of 78 percent.[1] (Although a small proportion of noncustodial parents in PFS were mothers, only noncustodial fathers were interviewed for the survey.)

It is worth noting that the evaluation could have conducted the noncustodial parent survey for a larger sample and then relied primarily on that survey to measure the impacts of the program. However, previous attempts to interview low-income noncustodial parents, such as the Survey of Absent Parents (SOAP), encountered great difficulty tracking sample members, incurring both high costs and unacceptably high nonresponse rates. Thus, fielding a noncustodial parent survey that would be large enough to detect PFS program impacts was judged an expensive strategy with uncertain payoff. In response to this issue, the PFS survey of custodial parents (who are more straightforward to track and interview than noncustodial parents)[2] was designed to have samples large enough to detect program impacts, while the smaller noncustodial parent survey was developed to provide the noncustodial parents' perspective.

An additional advantage of relying primarily on the custodial parent survey for measuring program impacts is that the custodial parents had little, if any, contact with the PFS program. Thus, they could provide information about the behavior of the noncustodial parents without

[1]For readers who are interested in the methods used to achieve this high response rate with a population that has historically been very difficult to locate and survey, a technical document describing the tracking and fielding techniques of the survey firm is available from the authors. One important factor was that, in order to participate in random assignment, the noncustodial parents in the PFS sample had all been located and had appeared at a child support hearing. Those noncustodial parents who did not want to be "found" under any circumstances would not have been in the PFS sample. In addition, at the child support hearing, both program and control group members filled out a "contact sheet" which gave the survey firm the names and addresses of several friends or family members who could provide a current address for the noncustodial parent if the survey firm had trouble locating him at the time of the survey.

[2]There are two major reasons that custodial parents are relatively easier to track and interview. First, since in this case all had received AFDC, they were more accustomed to working within a bureaucracy and providing information to people. Second, noncustodial parents with a history of nonpayment of child support have, by definition, a clear reason to avoid responding to attempts to contact them.

their responses being biased by socialization to the "correct" responses, as might be the case for noncustodial parents in the program group.

C. Child Support Enforcement (CSE) Payment Records

Automated records of monthly child support payments made by each noncustodial parent in the research sample were provided by the state CSE office for each of the sites participating in PFS.

D. MDRC's Baseline Information Form (BIF)

This one-page instrument was designed by MDRC to collect the following basic background information about noncustodial parents at the time of random assignment: age, race, education, family status, frequency of visits with child, arrest record, and some information on previous employment and earnings.[3]

II. Measures of Fathers' Involvement

A. Financial Support

Formal child support payments (impacts measured from CSE payments records).[4] This outcome is estimated using CSE payment records. "Paid any formal support" is a dichotomous variable equal to 1 if any payment was made for the target case, in any of the six months preceding the survey (approximately months 7-12 after random assignment). The average formal payment is the mean amount of child support paid for the target case, totaled across the six months preceding the survey. All estimates of average payments include $0 for those who made no payment, unless otherwise stated.[5]

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[3]In the case of noncustodial parents' earnings, baseline information is directly estimated from Unemployment Insurance (UI) earnings records. Automated records of each sample member's earnings in each calendar quarter of follow-up were supplied to MDRC by each participating site's state UI agency.

[4]This outcome is estimated using CSE payment records, even though custodial parents were asked on the survey about formal child support payments received. The survey asked them about the amount of formal support that they received through the CSE agency, not the amount that the noncustodial parent paid to the agency. Thus, it was assumed that custodial parents would underreport payment amounts because of the $50 pass-through rule for those on welfare; in fact, on average they did report lower amounts of support than are estimated using administrative records.

[5]Note that, in some families, it is possible that our measure of formal support excludes part of the formal support provided by the noncustodial parent to the custodial parent, because in some nonmarital child support cases, separate cases may be established for each child. Thus, by using data for only one formal support case per noncustodial parent, the estimates of formal support may not reflect all support the noncustodial parent provided for all children in the family. In contrast, survey questions about informal support were worded to ask the total amount of money that the noncustodial parent provided to the custodial parent for *all* their children, since it would be nearly impossible for parents to estimate the support provided for separate children within the same family.

However, in practice this distinction does not appear to lead to substantial differences in the number of children for whom formal and informal support are estimated. Among custodial parents who said that they had a support order in place at the time of the survey, about 85 percent reported that the order covered all the children whom the noncustodial and custodial parent had together. In addition, analyses not shown indicate that results for formal payments presented here are very similar to results that are obtained when all the noncusodial parent's payments are summed, because most noncustodial parents had only one case.

Informal cash child support payments (impacts measured from the custodial parent survey). These are cash contributions that the target custodial parent received directly from the noncustodial parent in the six months preceding the survey, or approximately months 7-12 after random assignment. Results are presented as a dichotomous variable reflecting whether any support was provided and as an average dollar value of support provided. Custodial parents were asked to estimate total child support provided by the noncustodial parent for the focal child as well as his or her siblings.

In-kind support (impacts measured from the custodial parent survey). This is support, other than money, provided by the noncustodial parent to the custodial parent or her household. This type of support includes things like repairs, groceries, clothing, school supplies, diapers, furniture, and gifts to the children.[6] This outcome is estimated using survey questions listing specific types of contributions that may have been received from the noncustodial parent in the six months preceding the survey. Results are presented as a dichotomous variable reflecting whether any support was provided and as an average dollar value of support provided. (Note that in 11 percent of cases, the custodial parent was unable to estimate the value of in-kind contributions. In those cases, parents instead reported the value as a range, relying on a set of ranges provided by the interviewer; the analysis imputes such values as the midpoint of the range chosen by the custodial parent.)

B. Nonfinancial Involvement

Noncustodial parents' contact with focal child (impacts measured from the custodial parent and noncustodial parent surveys). Measures of the frequency of noncustodial parents' contact and the types of contact that occurred during the six months prior to the survey are estimated using the custodial parent survey. Noncustodial parent survey responses are used to describe the types of activities that noncustodial parents engaged in with their children during visits.

Noncustodial parents' parenting (impacts measured from the custodial parent survey). These outcomes include a number of questions covering issues such as how frequently the custodial and the noncustodial parents have spoken, how often they have discussed the focal child, whether the noncustodial parent had any involvement in major decisions regarding the child in the six months prior to the survey, and the custodial parent's perceptions of the noncustodial parent's parenting skills.

Custodial and noncustodial parents' conflict (impacts measured from the custodial parent survey). Conflict between custodial and noncustodial parents is measured by their level of disagreement on various topics and the way in which they react to disagreements. For example, "Custodial parent reports frequent disagreements" is a dichotomous variable equal to 1 if a custodial parent reported disagreeing "a great deal" with the noncustodial parent about any of a list of topics such as child-rearing, child support, or visits. A second summary measure, "Custodial parent reports aggressive conflict," is equal to 1 if the custodial parent reported that she and the

[6]The survey also asked custodial parents to estimate the value of any baby-sitting provided by the noncustodial parent. However, the value of baby-sitting is not included in estimates of in-kind support.

noncustodial parent disagreed and reacted by arguing loudly or shouting at each other "very often or always" or if they ever reacted by hitting or throwing things at each other.[7]

III. Samples for This Report

The report discusses results based on three samples: the sample of respondents to the custodial parent survey, the sample of respondents to the noncustodial parent survey, and the sample of matched pairs (in which both the custodial and the noncustodial parents were interviewed).

A. Custodial Parent Survey Sample

The impact analyses presented in this report draw primarily on a sample of 2,005 respondents to the 12-month custodial parent follow-up survey. This survey sample represents a relatively late cohort of enrollees — those who were randomly assigned between March 1995 and March 1996. (The full PFS sample of 5,611 noncustodial parents was randomly assigned between March 1994 and June 1996.)[8]

In fact, in six of the seven sites, a survey was fielded for one custodial parent associated with each noncustodial parent who was randomly assigned between March 1995 and March 1996. In the seventh site, Los Angeles, only a subsample of custodial parents was surveyed, for noncustodial parents randomly assigned during a shorter period (November 1995 to March 1996). Because the proportion of noncustodial parents randomly assigned varied from month to month and because custodial parents in Los Angeles were undersampled in the survey, the number of surveys conducted in some sites is not proportionate to the sites' representation in the full PFS sample.[9] To aid in the comparison of survey findings with other results for the full PFS sample, the impacts presented in this report are weighted to match full-sample site proportions.

B. Noncustodial Parent Survey Sample

To provide descriptions of paternal involvement from the fathers' perspective, some descriptive analyses draw on the sample of noncustodial parents who responded to the 12-month noncustodial parent follow-up survey. This survey was fielded for the noncustodial parents associated with about one-quarter of the custodial parent survey sample.[10] Of the 553 noncustodial parents who responded, 102 reported that they currently lived with the custodial parent and the

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[7]These two measures of conflict are similar to measures used by Seltzer (1998), although Seltzer's measures were based on the responses of both parents.

[8]Note that while a total of 2,186 custodial parents responded to the survey, 8 percent of cases were excluded from analyses in this report because the noncustodial and the custodial parents were living in the same household, the custodial parent no longer lived with the focal child, or the noncustodial parent lived with the focal child. Because many of the survey questions assumed that the custodial parent and the child lived together and that the noncustodial parent lived apart from them, these families were given an abbreviated questionnaire that excluded most measures of paternal involvement. These excluded cases occurred in equal proportions for program and control group members.

[9]For example, Tennessee had a substantial increase in the volume of enrollment during the period from which the sample was drawn, leading to a disproportionately large sample from that site. In addition, Los Angeles needed to be undersampled in order to allow adequate sample sizes in the other sites for site-specific analyses.

[10]The noncustodial parent survey was fielded for men associated with both respondents and nonrespondents to the custodial parent survey.

child or that the child did not currently live with the custodial parent. For consistency with the custodial parent sample, these noncustodial parents were excluded from the analysis, for a final noncustodial survey sample of 450.

C. Matched-Pairs Sample

Where relevant, the report draws on supplementary descriptive analyses that compare custodial and noncustodial parents' responses to questions that were common to both surveys. These analyses rely on a matched sample of custodial and noncustodial parents, which has a joint response rate of 78 percent. (Of the 553 pairs in which both parents were in their respective survey samples, there were 521 pairs in which both parents responded, which is a response rate of 94 percent.) The analyses in this report exclude those cases in which either the custodial parent or the noncustodial parent reported that the parents were living together or the custodial parent reported that she was not living with the child. This results in a matched-pairs sample of 421 respondent pairs.

In many cases, the levels of involvement were reported quite differently by the two parents. Clearly, the responses of either parent may be biased for a variety of reasons, likely in opposite directions, and there is little basis for judging which responses are more accurate. (For example, a noncustodial father's reports of visitation may be biased upward, assuming that maintaining involvement with his children is the socially preferred response; a custodial mother's reports may be biased downward, assuming that any negative feelings toward the father lead her to portray him negatively.) However, as children got older and more independent, it became possible that the noncustodial parent could have visited the child or provided informal support directly to the child without the custodial parent's knowing about it.

IV. Characteristics of the Samples

A. Characteristics of the Noncustodial Parents in the PFS Sample

The eligibility criteria for PFS clearly affected the demographic composition of the noncustodial parent sample relative to nonresident fathers nationally. Three of the main criteria — that noncustodial parents must have had at least one child on welfare, must have had child support arrears,[11] and must have been unemployed or in a low-wage job — as well as the concentration of program sites in central cities suggest that the noncustodial fathers in the PFS sample should have been much more disadvantaged than the average nonresident father. At the same time, a fourth criteria, that the noncustodial parent must have had a child support order in place, means that PFS was working with noncustodial parents who were known to the CSE system. In fact, only about one-third of women on welfare have a child support order in place, and only 1 in 10 children born out of wedlock have one.[12] Moreover, the fact that random assignment occurred at a child support hearing limited the sample to noncustodial parents who were, in fact, willing to show up (perhaps indicating

[11]Or, for those with new support orders in place, no apparent means of meeting their obligation.

[12]Calculated from Sorensen's analysis (1997) of the 1990 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and from Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1989.

that they might have been more receptive to a program intervention than the average noncustodial parent).

The net result of these criteria is a sample of noncustodial parents who are very economically disadvantaged. In fact, data about this sample may help to provide information about low-income, minority, nonresident fathers, who are typically underrepresented in national surveys. As described in earlier reports, about 50 percent of the noncustodial parents lack a high school credential, 64 percent are African-American, and about 70 percent have been arrested at least once since age 16.

Table 2.1 compares selected characteristics of the noncustodial fathers in the PFS sample with four previously published analyses of national samples of noncustodial fathers. The first column represents the characteristics of PFS respondents to the noncustodial parent survey.[13] The second column presents the characteristics of noncustodial parents whose income was below the poverty line, as measured from the 1990 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) (Martinson, 1998). The third and fourth columns represent two different attempts to describe all nonresident fathers nationally, rather than restricting the sample to low-income fathers, using the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) and the SIPP (Garfinkel, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1995; Sorensen, 1997).

The first two columns of Table 2.1 show that the PFS sample and a national sample of low-income noncustodial parents are similar in age and education level. The PFS sample is less likely to have ever married, presumably because, unlike the national sample, the PFS sample is constrained to fathers whose children have received welfare. For the PFS sample, the proportion who had no work in the prior year is lower than in the national sample, and their estimated annual income is higher, probably because the national sample is constrained to include only fathers whose annual income fell below the poverty line. Nevertheless, the incomes reported for both samples are very low.

A comparison of the characteristics of the PFS sample and of the national samples of nonresident fathers shown in columns 3 and 4 indicates that, as one would expect, the PFS sample is much more disadvantaged than nonresident fathers nationally. The noncustodial parents in the PFS sample are considerably more likely to be under the age of 30, less likely to have a high school credential, and more likely to live alone; they are more likely to report no work in the prior year and have substantially lower estimated annual income.

B. Characteristics of the PFS Sample That May Affect Visitation or Involvement

Prior research has shown that existing characteristics of custodial and noncustodial parents affect the involvement and visitation of nonresident fathers. Some of these factors that could have been affected by PFS are shown in Table 2.2, including the distance that the noncustodial

[13]Demographic characteristics presented in Table 2.1 are estimated only for the 261 control group members to ensure that the program did not affect any of the characteristics of the sample that were measured after random assignment. This allows a valid comparison with other samples of noncustodial parents.

Table 2.1
Parents' Fair Share

PFS Noncustodial Parents Compared with National Samples of Noncustodial Parents

Characteristic	PFS Noncustodial Parent Survey Sample[a]	National Sample of Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers (SIPP)[b]	National Samples of Nonresident Fathers (NSFH)[c]	National Samples of Nonresident Fathers (SIPP)[d]
Demographic characteristics (%)[e]				
Age				
25 years old or less	27	26	—	—
Under 30 years old	47	—	—	29
Race/ethnicity[f]				
White	15	35	—	59
African-American	60	48	—	27
Hispanic	23	15	—	12
Other	2	2	—	3
Never married	60	39	—	18
No high school diploma	47	45	22	25
Lives alone	37	—	15	17
In good health	74	—	80	—
Disabled	12	—	14	—
Substance abuse	14	—	8	—
Employment and earnings				
Employment in prior year (%)				
Worked full time throughout the year	20[g]	10	—	—
Worked intermittently	—	45	—	—
Worked 0 weeks	23	—	—	10
Weeks worked per year if working	—	30	48	—
Hours worked per week if working	38	—	36	—
Average hourly wage ($)	7.04	5.40[h]	14.00	—
Average annual income ($)	5,863	3,932	26,864[i]	23,070

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

SOURCES: See notes below.

NOTES: [a]PFS noncustodial parent survey. Responses are weighted to reflect the full PFS research sample across sites.

[b]1990 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), Martinson (1998).

[c]National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH); Garfinkel, McLanahan, and Hanson (1995).

[d]Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), Sorensen (1997).

[e]Demographic characteristics are estimated from the noncustodial parent survey; therefore, the time period is approximately one year after random assignment. To ensure that no characteristics were affected by the program, estimates are based on the 261 control group members only.

[f]PFS ethnicity information is calculated using the PFS Baseline Information Form (BIF).

[g]Defined as working 30 hours per week or more, for 12 months of the year.

[h]Reported in 1990 dollars. Measured only for hourly workers.

[i]Reported in 1995 dollars.

Table 2.2
Parents' Fair Share

Characteristics and Preferences of the PFS Sample That May Affect Visitation

Characteristic/Preference	PFS Sample
Characteristics (%)[a]	
NCP lives within 10 miles of child at time of random assignment	75.6
NCP lives in the same state as child at time of random assignment	92.2
NCP has legal visitation agreement	30.1
Visitation preferences (%)[b]	
Both NCP and CP report that they would like at least weekly visits between NCP and child	58.9
NCP, but not CP, prefers visits to occur at least weekly	31.0
CP, but not NCP, prefers visits to occur at least weekly	4.5
Neither CP nor NCP prefers visits to occur at least weekly	5.7

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from the custodial parent and noncustodial parent surveys.
NOTES: The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a]Estimated using the noncustodial parent survey sample.

[b]Estimated using the matched-pairs sample.

parent lived from the child, legal visitation agreements, and the visitation preferences of the custodial and noncustodial parents (referred to as CP and NCP in the tables throughout this report).

Most noncustodial parents in the PFS sample lived within 10 miles of the focal child (75.6 percent), or at least lived in the same state (92.2 percent). Note that in a national sample of nonresident fathers who responded to the NSFH, only 41.2 percent lived within 10 miles of their child (Cooksey and Craig, 1998). Fathers in the PFS sample were probably more likely than average to live near their children, since many PFS sites required that they live in the same county as the custodial parent, to help avoid complications caused by differences in jurisdiction.

Despite the PFS eligibility requirement that all sample members have a support order in place, fewer than one-third of noncustodial parents at random assignment had a legal visitation agreement, which outlines rules about visitation for both parents. This low proportion reflects the fact that fathers who are not married to their child's mother are much less likely to obtain a legal visitation agreement than those who are married.

Finally, the frequency of visitation could clearly be influenced by each parent's opinion about how frequently visits should occur. Visitation preferences for the smaller matched-pairs sample show that parents' level of agreement appears to be a potential source of tension. Interestingly, in the majority of families (58.9 percent), both parents reported that they preferred visits to occur at least weekly. However, there is substantial potential for impeded visitation in about one-third (31.0 percent) of families, in which the noncustodial parent preferred visits to occur at least weekly, while the custodial parent did not.

C. Characteristics of the Custodial Parent Sample

To assess the generalizability of the PFS sample relative to welfare families nationally, selected demographic characteristics of the custodial parents are compared with those of a national sample of mothers who receive welfare and with a sample of mothers on welfare who have a child support order in place. It is clear from this comparison that the noncustodial parent sample is connected with a particular segment of the welfare population — one that is particularly economically disadvantaged but still has the advantage of having a child support order in place. These characteristics should be kept in mind when drawing conclusions from the results.

Table 2.3 presents characteristics of the custodial parent survey sample — custodial parents who responded to the follow-up survey that was conducted 12 months after the associated noncustodial parents were randomly assigned to the PFS program or control group. The PFS custodial parents are comparable in age to the welfare population. The welfare population with child support orders is slightly older than both the PFS sample and the overall welfare population. The proportion of the PFS custodial parent sample that is African-American is quite high compared with welfare parents and especially compared with welfare parents who have child support orders. Two-thirds of the PFS sample is black, compared with less than half the welfare population and one-third of the welfare population who have orders. Compared with nonresident fathers nationally, African-Americans are particularly overrepresented in the PFS sample, reflecting the program's focus on serving unemployed men living in urban areas.

Table 2.3
Parents' Fair Share

Characteristics of PFS Custodial Parents Compared with Single Parents on Welfare in 1989

Characteristic	PFS Sample	Welfare Parents	Welfare Parents with Child Support Order
Characteristics of CP (%)			
Age of custodial parent			
Under 22	14.7	11.1	6.4
22-30	48.9	48.0	48.5
31-40	28.9	31.2	35.1
Over 40	7.4	9.7	10.0
Race/ethnicity of custodial parent			
White	18.9	34.8	56.3
African-American	65.8	43.8	30.0
Hispanic	15.4	17.9	10.9
Educational attainment			
Less than high school	47.5	43.6	32.1
At least high school diploma	52.5	56.4	67.9
Marital status			
Never married	66.9	56.8	33.9
Divorced	14.6	24.1	43.7
Separated	10.2	18.9	21.7
Widowed	1.3	0.3	0.8
Married	7.2	N/A	N/A
Number of children			
1[a]	23.1	40.7	42.9
2-3	58.7	51.2	52.0
4 or more	18.2	8.1	6.0
Characteristics of CP/NCP and their child (%)			
NCP/CP marital status			
Ever married	17.6	—	—
Ever cohabit	31.7	—	—
Never married or cohabit	50.6	—	—
Age of youngest child[b]			
Under 3	25.5	60.4	—
3-5	29.8	22.3	—
6-10	27.1	12.9	—
Over 10	17.7	4.4	—
Mean age of youngest child	6.0	—	—
Child support order in place	100	34.3[c]	100

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from the custodial parent survey and the 1990 Current Population Survey (CPS).[d]

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a]For the welfare samples, this category includes women who were on welfare when they were pregnant but did not yet have a child.

[b]The source for data on age of youngest child for welfare parents is the U.S. House of Representatives, 1996, p. 508.

[c]Custodial parent reported that she was eligible for child support in prior year (CPS).

[d]CPS data are weighted using weights provided by the U.S. Census Bureau to reflect national averages.

The proportion of custodial parents who have a high school diploma is slightly lower in the PFS sample than in the welfare population nationally, but it is much lower compared with welfare parents who have child support orders. In addition, PFS parents are much more likely to have never been married, compared with other welfare mothers either with or without child support orders. The average custodial parent in the PFS sample also has more children than both of the national welfare samples.

While 66 percent of the custodial parents associated with the PFS sample were never married, it is more relevant for purposes of evaluating PFS that over 80 percent of them were never married to the noncustodial parent who was part of the PFS research sample. In addition, half of the custodial and noncustodial parents neither married nor cohabited. Thus, although the survey did not ask when the noncustodial parent began living apart from the child, for a substantial proportion of the sample the age of their youngest child is a reasonable proxy.

On average, the youngest child of the parents is 6 years old. According to previous research, this suggests that for typical research sample members, patterns of visitation (or nonvisitation) have been relatively stable for some time, and that increasing fathers' levels of contact with their children may prove difficult.

Chapter 3

Effects of Parents' Fair Share on Fathers' Involvement for the Custodial Parent Survey Sample

I. Analytic Approach: Outcomes and Impacts

Throughout, this report distinguishes between two types of measures. *Control group outcomes* represent the absolute levels of particular measures of involvement that are achieved in the absence of PFS. *Program impacts*, or the differences in outcomes between program and control group members, represent the effects of PFS. The random assignment design permits valid estimates of program impacts to be made by comparing outcomes for the program and control groups. Assigning the noncustodial fathers at random to each group ensured that there were no systematic differences in the characteristics of members of the two groups at the outset. Any differences in outcomes between the groups that developed after random assignment, therefore, can be attributed to referral to PFS.

One requirement of an experimental analysis is to compare average outcomes for *all* members of the program group with average outcomes for *all* members of the control group. This means, for example, that impact estimates comparing average payments between the two groups include zeros for those members who did not pay. To do otherwise would violate the tenets of an experimental design. Because PFS impact estimates include all sample members who were assigned to the program and control groups, these estimates measure the effect of *being referred to PFS and subject to its mandates* to participate and pay child support, rather than the effect of *participating* in PFS. Therefore, when interpreting the findings, it is important to keep in mind that the group for which impacts are measured includes the 70 percent of program group members who participated in PFS services as well as the 30 percent of program group members who were exposed to the PFS mandate but never participated.

Outcomes and program impacts are estimated for the full sample as well as for a variety of subgroups representing the age of the child, the characteristics of family relationships, the parents' economic circumstances, and the noncustodial parents' demographic characteristics. When possible, subgroups are defined using variables measured at baseline; however, in some cases, measures of interest are available only from the survey (that is, approximately one year after random assignment). Impact findings for subgroups based on variables measured after random assignment are considered nonexperimental and are presented in italics in the tables to distinguish them from experimental analyses.

Impacts are regression-adjusted using background characteristics of the sample, including age, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, prior employment, prior child support payments, and other relevant demographics. In addition, as discussed earlier, the impacts presented are weighted to reflect the representation of each site in the full PFS sample.[1]

[1]As shown in Appendix Table A, the weighting of responses results in a small, but not statistically significant, increase in the impact reported for formal support paid.

II. Financial Involvement: Formal and Informal Child Support

This section presents findings about noncustodial parents' provision of financial support to their children. This includes *formal support*, as measured through administrative child support enforcement (CSE) records; and *informal support* provided directly to the custodial parent or the child, as reported in the custodial parent survey.

The section begins by explaining the limitations of the measure of formal support that is used in this report; it then describes control group outcomes, followed by program impacts. (Similarly, for other forms of parental involvement presented later, the outcomes for the control group are discussed before the impacts of PFS.)

A. Limitations on Measures of Formal Support for Purposes of This Report

Readers should keep in mind that only limited measures of formal support are presented in the current report, to maintain comparability between survey responses about informal support and administrative records measures of formal support. Specifically:

- The follow-up time period of the interim PFS report was six quarters, or 18 months. To parallel the survey responses, the measures of formal support presented here cover only months 7-12 after random assignment.
- The sample for this report is more limited than that of other reports because it represents only a subset of the full PFS research sample, as described earlier.
- In contrast to other PFS reports, the current report does not measure formal child support by summing all payments made within the follow-up period by the noncustodial father to all custodial parents for whom he has a child support case. Because the custodial parent survey provides information on informal support, contact, and other measures of involvement for only one custodial parent per noncustodial parent, the measures of formal support presented here include only support paid for one child support case — the one that includes the focal child from the custodial parent survey. Although this does not substantially change the pattern of results (because most noncustodial parents had only one child support case), it does mean that the formal support measures presented here are less comprehensive than the measures used in other PFS reports.

Given these limitations, impacts on formal support that are presented in this report are provided primarily to aid in the interpretation of impacts on informal support, and they should not be considered a comprehensive assessment of the effects of PFS on formal child support payments. A fuller assessment for an early cohort was presented in the 1998 interim report (Doolittle et al., 1998), and a forthcoming report summarizing the final impacts of the PFS evaluation will provide longer-term follow-up about formal support for the full PFS sample.

B. Levels of Financial Support Provided by Control Group Members

The outcomes presented for the control group in Table 3.1 provide a portrait of the child support payment behavior in the absence of PFS. The majority of the noncustodial parents — about two-thirds — provided some kind of financial contribution during the six months prior to the follow-up survey.[2] Importantly, both formal and informal contributions were significant components of the support provided by noncustodial parents in the PFS sample. During this six-month period, about 43 percent of control group members made any payments through the formal CSE system. A similar proportion (41 percent) provided any kind of informal or in-kind contributions directly to the custodial parent, according to the custodial parent survey.

Table 3.1 also provides information about the use of specific kinds of informal assistance — cash versus in-kind contributions.[3] A much higher proportion of noncustodial parents made in-kind contributions (38.4 percent) than informal cash payments (14.3 percent).[4] In fact, *those who made informal cash payments are essentially a subset of those who made in-kind contributions*, since nearly all custodial parents who reported receiving either type of informal contribution (41.2 percent) also reported receiving in-kind contributions (38.4 percent).

Even though similar proportions of noncustodial parents paid formal and informal types of support, the average value of the formal support across all families ($313) is much higher than the value of informal support ($149). Underlying this pattern is the fact that those noncustodial parents who paid any formal support tended to pay more over the six-month follow-up than those noncustodial parents who provided any informal contributions ($721 versus $361).

Note, however, that in the smaller sample presented in Appendix Table B, noncustodial parents' estimates of the value of their informal contributions are much higher than the estimates provided by custodial parents. This is because noncustodial parents were considerably more likely to report that they had made *any* informal cash contributions than were custodial parents,

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[2]Interestingly, a prior study that compared formal and informal support in some detail (Edin, 1995; Edin and Lein, 1997) found that 60 percent of welfare recipients received either formal or informal support — very close to the PFS control group rate of 65.9 percent. However, the distribution of this overall rate among different *types* of support differs between the two samples. Edin's sample was less likely to get formal support and was more likely to get informal support. It makes sense that the PFS sample has higher rates of formal support, because, unlike Edin's sample, PFS sample members had to have a child support in place before entering the study. It is possible that the higher levels of informal support reported in Edin's sample could be related to better recall resulting from a more in-depth, intensive interviewing method used by Edin's team.

[3]Until recently, few national surveys that included questions about child support payments distinguished among payments made through the CSE system (which we refer to as formal payments), informal cash payments made directly by the noncustodial parent to the custodial parent (referred to as informal payments), and in-kind support such as repairs, clothing, furniture, diapers, presents, groceries, and school items.

Nevertheless, some smaller prior studies have suggested that in-kind contributions of items needed in the household play a significant role, particularly when the noncustodial parent can provide little cash. For example, in the Public/Private Ventures pilot project for young unwed fathers, about half the 155 fathers reported giving cash support to the custodial parents, while 93 percent reported some type of in-kind contributions (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994). In addition, among 214 mothers receiving welfare who were interviewed by Edin and her colleagues (1995), nearly two-thirds received either cash or in-kind support. Of these, about half received solely in-kind support, while the other half received at least some formal or informal cash payments.

[4]The most common types of in-kind contributions were clothes for the children, followed by presents (other than diapers, clothes, shoes, and bikes, which were asked about separately) and house or car repairs.

Table 3.1
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Child Support Provided to CSE and to Custodial Parents During the Six Months Prior to Survey[a]

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
Frequency of support (%)			
Paid any formal or informal support	67.5	65.9	1.6
Paid formal support to CSE[b]	50.2	43.4	6.8 ***
Paid informal support to CP[c]	41.4	41.2	0.2
Any informal cash payments	12.5	14.3	-1.8
Any in-kind support	39.1	38.4	0.7
Average value of support provided ($)[d]			
Average formal and informal support	507	460	47
Average formal support to CSE[b]	397	313	84 **
Average informal support to CP[c]	112	149	-37 **
Average informal cash payments	32	63	-31 ***
Average value of in-kind support[e]	80	87	-7
Average support among those making payments ($)[f]			
Average formal and informal support	*751*	*698*	*53*
Average formal support to CSE[b]	*791*	*721*	*70*
Average informal support to CP[c]	*269*	*361*	*-91*
Average informal cash payments	*254*	*437*	*-184*
Average value of in-kind support[e]	*205*	*226*	*-21*
Sample size (total=2,005)			

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from child support enforcement (CSE) payment records and the custodial parent survey.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

Italics indicate analyses that were performed on a subgroup not defined by baseline characteristics and which are therefore considered nonexperimental.

The abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a] "Six months prior to survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post-random assignment.

[b] Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. They are measured using administrative records rather than survey responses.

[c] Informal support includes informal cash payments and in-kind support provided by the noncustodial parent directly to the custodial parent.

[d] Average value of support provided includes zero values for those who made no payments of the type being estimated.

[e] Respondents who could not precisely estimate the value of in-kind contributions reported the value using ranges provided by the interviewer. For this 11 percent of respondents, means were estimated using the midpoints of each range.

[f] Program-control group differences in average support among those making payments were not tested for statistical significance.

and because their estimates of the *value* of their in-kind contributions are twice as high as the estimates of the custodial parents. (Interestingly, the responses concerning the proportions of noncustodial parents making any in-kind contributions and parents' estimates of the value of informal cash payments match fairly closely.)[5]

Finally, additional analyses not shown in the table indicate that *nearly all* noncustodial parents who provided informal support had some degree of contact with their children. This is logical, but it points out an important connection between visitation and the provision of informal support. While this association does not prove that noncustodial parents would reduce their in-kind support if visits were curtailed, such a causal connection seems plausible, because the visits provide a venue for the father to make the contribution. (Conversely, it is also possible that if the father's contribution is reduced, he will have less contact with his children, because either he or the mother sees fulfillment of his "breadwinning role" as a prerequisite for visiting.)

C. Impacts of PFS on Financial Support

Financial support paid by the noncustodial parent. The first panel of results in Table 3.1 shows that PFS did not increase the likelihood that noncustodial parents would provide any child support during months 7-12 after random assignment, when both formal and informal payments are taken into account. However, the program did increase the likelihood of making formal payments during this period: 50.2 percent of the program group provided formal contributions, compared with 43.4 percent of the control group, for a 6.8 percentage point increase. The program did not affect the likelihood that noncustodial parents would provide either informal cash payments or in-kind support directly to the custodial parents. This pattern of results (impacts on formal payments but not on "any" payments) suggests that all the effects on formal payments may have occurred within the group that was already providing informal payments.

The second panel on Table 3.1 shows that there is no statistically significant change in the total average value of support provided. PFS did increase by $84 the average amount of formal support paid by program group members ($397) compared with control group members ($313). (Note that the average value of support provided includes zero payments for sample members who provided no support over the six months.) This result should be viewed with caution, because the 1998 interim report indicated that the first half of the PFS sample did not show a statistically significant increase in average payments over a longer (18-month) follow-up period, and because preliminary analyses indicate that the full PFS sample does not show statistically significant increases in average payments. The increase in average payments reported here appears to be driven mainly by relatively large impacts on formal payments in Los Angeles, where the cohort that was eligible for the survey shows much larger increases in formal payments than the rest of the PFS sample in that site.[6] However, the increase in formal payments that is reported here for

[5]The pattern of discrepancies for informal cash payments — in which the parents reported the presence of any payments very differently but reported the amount of any payments very similarly — parallels results from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) (Seltzer and Brandreth, 1995). Presumably, the value of in-kind payments is by definition harder for custodial parents to estimate than the value of cash payments.

[6]While the unweighted impacts on formal support are statistically significant, the weighting procedure increased the absolute size of the impacts reported, both because Los Angeles had particularly large impacts and because Los Angeles received substantial weight in the weighting procedure to reflect its representation in the full PFS sample (see Appendix Table A).

the custodial parent survey sample did come at the expense of a smaller decrease in the amount of informal support provided, with program group members' contributions averaging $112 and control group members' contributions averaging $149.

The results in the third panel of Table 3.1 show the differences in payments made *among those making any payments.* These results are presented in italics because they are nonexperimental; that is, they compare only program and control group members who made any payments, rather than all members of the two research groups. They are nevertheless instructive. In the case of formal payments, over the six-month follow-up there are increases both in the proportion making any payments and in the amount paid among those who made a payment. Analyses not shown in the table indicate that the increase in average amounts paid actually reflects an increase in the consistency of payments among those who made at least one payment; the average payment for a given month with any payment actually tends to be lower for the program group than the control group. This is consistent with fuller analyses of child support impacts presented in the 1998 interim report, which found that PFS increased the regularity of child support payments (rather than producing, for example, just a one-time increase in payments for a family).

In contrast, for informal support, there was little change over the six-month period in the likelihood of making a contribution, but the dollar amounts of the informal cash payments that were made declined. Although no data are available to indicate the number of months in which informal support was provided, it appears that requiring additional people to provide formal support does not lead them to stop supplying informal support altogether, but rather to reduce either the dollar value or the consistency of informal support.

It is worth noting that most of the *decrease* in informal support for the program group came primarily from lower cash payments rather than from reduced in-kind support. Recall that those making cash payments are a subset of those making in-kind contributions. It appears that when noncustodial parents need to reduce their contribution, it is cash payments that are reduced.[7] The third panel of the table provides a possible explanation. Although more people provided in-kind support than informal cash payments (38.4 versus 14.3 percent, for the control group), after excluding those who made no payments, the average *value* of any cash support that was provided over six months ($437) is considerably higher than the value of in-kind support provided ($226). Thus, there simply may be more room to reduce informal cash payments than in-kind contributions.

It may also be that patterns of in-kind support are simply less sensitive to a noncustodial father's changing economic circumstances, either because the child and the custodial parent expect him to provide a particular in-kind item or because his ability to provide it depends less on his current income than does a cash payment. In contrast, he may well see any increase in pay-

[7]Additional analyses suggest that the increase in the value of formal support paid came in part from people who had been providing informal support and in part from people who had not been providing any support at all. This may help explain why the men reduced their informal payments by a smaller dollar amount than they increased their formal payments; only some of the men who had increased the value of their formal payments had any informal payments to reduce.

ments to the CSE system as necessarily requiring a reduction in cash payments to the custodial parent.[8]

Net financial support received by the custodial parent. Since AFDC rules do not pass through to custodial parents on welfare all the formal child support paid by noncustodial parents, the results presented in Table 3.1 do not tell us how much these payments actually affected the income of custodial parents. To answer that question requires an understanding of how the $84 impact in formal payments is distributed between payments above and below the $50 threshold for the pass-through.

Table 3.2 helps to shed light on this question: Taking into account the impacts on both formal and informal payments, did PFS increase or decrease the amount of child support that was actually received by the custodial parent? For the month prior to the survey interview, the table presents estimates of how much of the formal child support paid was passed through to the custodial parent, how much informal cash support was paid,[9] and the net effect for the average custodial parent. Note that the amounts passed through were not directly measured but are estimated based on the amount paid, the custodial parents' welfare status, and the pass-through rules applicable in each state.[10]

The top panel of Table 3.2 shows that for the one month prior to the survey none of these impacts (on formal support, total payments to the custodial parent, informal cash support, and the amount passed through) is not large enough to be statistically significant. In essence, the custodial parents neither gained nor lost financially from PFS. However, the program did increase by 6.5 percentage points the likelihood that custodial parents received a pass-through payment in the prior month.

Because the proportion of child support that was passed through depended on the AFDC status of the custodial parent, the table also presents estimates by welfare status. For neither group of custodial parents did the program have a net effect on the total child support available.

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[8]It is also possible that since it is difficult for custodial parents to estimate the value of in-kind contributions, impacts that are estimated based on custodial parent reports would not be very sensitive to incremental changes in the value of in-kind support provided. If that were the case, reductions of in-kind contributions — and, in turn, of overall informal support — could be underestimated here. However, according to a separate analysis of the matched-pairs sample, noncustodial parent reports do not indicate any reduction of in-kind contributions as a result of PFS.

[9]In-kind contributions are not included in this analysis because the survey only asked about the entire six months preceding the survey, not about such contributions in the one month prior to it.

[10]Estimates were made for the month prior to the survey because this is the only month for which custodial parents were asked whether they were receiving AFDC. Because child support administrative records do not identify pass-through amounts, these amounts were estimated as follows. For custodial parents who were off welfare, it was assumed that all payments were passed through. (This would be accurate in most cases, since custodial parents were generally paid up to the full amount of the support order, before any support is kept by the state to offset previous arrears.) For custodial parents receiving AFDC, in all states except Tennessee, the first $50 of the month's payment is assumed to be passed through. In Tennessee, which has a "fill-the-gap" policy, child support can be passed through up to the level that the AFDC grant plus the pass-through equals the state's "standard of need." Because most child support payments in the PFS Tennessee sample would not have exceeded that threshold, the estimates of pass-throughs assume that 100 percent of Tennessee's formal child support payments was passed through, regardless of the welfare status of the custodial parent.

Table 3.2
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Child Support Paid to Custodial Parents During the Month Prior to Survey[a]

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
All Families			
Average child support in prior month[b]			
NCP formal payments to CSE ($)[c]	65	54	11
Total cash support CP received ($)	49	44	5
Estimated pass-through to CP[d]	41	34	7
Average informal cash to CP	7	10	-2
Formal child support passed through in prior month (%)			
None	69.5	76.0	-6.5 ***
$1 - $50	17.2	14.0	3.2 *
$51+	13.4	10.0	3.3 **
Sample size (total=1,740)	855	888	
CP receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)			
Average child support in prior month[b]			
NCP formal payments to CSE ($)[c]	58	46	12
Total cash support CP received ($)	23	19	4
Estimated pass-through to CP[d]	17	12	4 **
Average informal cash to CP	6	7	0
Formal child support passed through in prior month (%)			
None	72.9	77.5	-4.6 *
$1 - 50	24.5	21.1	3.4
$51+	2.6	1.4	1.2 *
Sample size (total=1,040)	521	519	
CP not receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)			
Average child support in prior month[b]			
NCP formal payments to CSE[c]	75	68	7
Total cash support CP received	85	81	3
Estimated pass-through to CP[d]	75	68	7
Average informal cash to CP	9	13	-4
Formal child support passed through in prior month (%)			
None	65.1	72.9	-7.8 **
$1 - 50	5.9	3.7	2.1
$51+	29.0	23.4	5.6 *
Sample size (total=700)	333	367	

(continued)

Table 3.2 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from child support enforcement (CSE) payment records and the custodial parent survey.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a]"The month prior to survey" corresponds to month 12 post-random assignment.

[b]Average value of support includes zero values for those who made no payments of the type being estimated.

[c]Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. They are measured using administrative records rather than survey responses.

[d]For all sites, the pass-through for custodial parents not receiving AFDC was estimated as 100 percent of formal payments in that month. For all sites except Tennessee, the pass-through for custodial parents who were receiving AFDC was estimated as the first $50 of any formal payments made that month. In Tennessee, child support could be passed through up to the level that equals the state-defined standard of need (AFDC grant plus child support passed through). Because most child support payments in Tennessee are below this level for the PFS sample, these estimates assume that all child support in Tennessee is passed through.

At the same time, dividing the sample into AFDC recipients and nonrecipients does help to illustrate how the pass-through system affected custodial parents' income. For custodial parents who were receiving AFDC at the time of the follow-up survey, the average amount of formal child support paid by noncustodial parents in the control group was slightly lower than for custodial parents not receiving AFDC ($46 versus $68, respectively). These lower average formal payments, combined with the limit of $50 passed through for those receiving AFDC, resulted in a smaller amount passed through for those who were receiving welfare ($46, on average, compared with the full $68 for those not receiving welfare). Thus, the total cash support received was much higher for those off AFDC than for those on AFDC ($81 versus $19), even though informal payments were similar for the two groups.

The overall story from this limited analysis is that, from the perspective of the custodial parents, the net result of PFS (at least in a one-month period) was no detectable change in their total income. Thus, while PFS did not achieve substantial improvements in custodial families' incomes, it also did not *decrease* their income. This could have occurred if noncustodial parents had reacted to their increased formal payments by reducing their informal payments by the same amount (because custodial parents on AFDC received only part of the formal payments made but all of the informal payments).

III. Father-Child Contact

Table 3.3 presents findings on the frequency with which the typical noncustodial father had contact with his child. (For this purpose, survey questions asked about a focal child — the youngest child who had received welfare and for whom the father owed child support.) Findings are also presented about the kinds of activities in which the father and child engaged during visits.

A. Frequency and Types of Contact for Control Group Members

As shown in Table 3.3, only a small proportion of noncustodial parents in the PFS sample were completely out of contact with their children; the vast majority (80 percent) visited their child within the past year. This level of contact is slightly higher than levels reported for nonresident fathers nationally, consistent with the facts that contact tends to be higher when children are younger and when mothers have not remarried, that the PFS sample represents the parents' youngest child, and that PFS mothers had a relatively low rate of remarriage.[11] Moreover, PFS only enrolled fathers with child support orders who had shown up at a hearing, and sites typically constrained the sample to fathers who lived in the same county as the custodial parent.

In addition, nearly half of fathers in the PFS sample (46 percent) had regular contact, visiting their children at least once per month, and about 30 percent visited their child at least once

[11]The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) indicate that about 70 percent of nonresident fathers had seen their child during the past year (Seltzer and Brandreth, 1995; King, 1994).

Table 3.3
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Noncustodial Parent Contact with Child During the Six Months Prior to Survey[a]

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
Frequency and length of contact between NCP and child (reported by CP)			
Months since last visit between NCP and child (%)			
Last visit was within the past year	80.2	80.8	0.6
Less than 1 month ago	34.2	37.2	-3.0
1-2 months ago	24.3	24.0	0.3
3-6 months ago	13.1	11.9	1.2
7-12 months ago	8.6	7.8	0.9
Last visit was more than 1 year ago	17.8	17.9	-0.2
Never saw child	2.0	1.3	0.7
NCP contact during past 6 months (%)			
Frequency of visits			
None (past 6 months)	30.6	29.6	1.0
Less than once per month	21.7	24.4	-2.7
At least once per month	47.7	46.0	1.7
Once per month	6.4	4.8	1.6
2-3 times per month	12.1	11.1	1.0
Once per week	10.2	8.6	1.6
More than once per week	11.0	12.0	-1.0
Daily	8.0	9.5	-1.5
Length of usual visit among those who visit			
Half day or less	*56.4*	*55.1*	*1.3*
More than 5 hours/not overnight	*14.3*	*15.6*	*-1.3*
Overnight	*11.1*	*10.0*	*1.1*
Weekend	*15.8*	*16.2*	*-0.4*
Several days or more	*2.4*	*3.2*	*-0.8*
Ever extended visit (overnight +)	37.5	37.6	0.0
Frequency of phone/mail contact with child			
None	49.4	49.8	-0.4
Less than once per month	14.9	15.7	-0.8
Once per month	4.2	4.2	0.0
2-3 times per month	7.2	6.8	0.4
Once per week	6.9	5.0	2.0 *
More than once per week	9.9	10.3	-0.4
Daily	7.4	8.2	-0.8
NCP ever baby-sat past 6 months	14.3	14.7	-0.4
Number of hours of baby-sitting per week	1.2	1.3	-0.1
Sample size (total=2,005)[b]	991	1,014	

(continued)

Table 3.3 (continued)

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
Activities during visits (reported by NCP)			
NCP and child ever visit and engage in any of the following activities:	70.0	64.1	5.9
Age 1-17			
Outings (picnics, movies, sports)	63.2	56.4	6.8
Project, school work, talking, playing	67.3	61.0	6.3
Under age 5			
Reading to child	65.3	54.3	11.0
Age 5-17			
Religious activities	39.1	24.4	14.7 **
Attending school activities	35.6	25.9	9.7
Sample size (total=450)[c]	243	207	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from the custodial parent survey and the noncustodial parent survey.

NOTES: A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

Italics indicate analyses that were performed on a subgroup not defined by baseline characteristics and which are therefore considered nonexperimental.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a] "Six months prior to the survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post random assignment.

[b] Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

[c] Analyses exclude 102 cases in which the noncustodial parent reported that he lived with the child or that the custodial parent did not live with the child.

per week.[12] Among those who visited, the usual visit lasted approximately half a day, although a sizable proportion (37.6 percent) of custodial parents reported that noncustodial parents kept their children overnight at least once during the prior six months.

Although the custodial parents reported that a substantial proportion of noncustodial parents had regular contact with their children, note that levels of visitation as reported by the *noncustodial parents* are even higher. Within the smaller noncustodial parent sample, presented in Appendix Table B, 61.7 percent reported seeing their children monthly, and 44 percent reported seeing them at least weekly. This is consistent with prior research on differences in noncustodial and custodial parents' reporting patterns (Seltzer and Bandreth, 1995).

Absent fathers may also communicate with their nonresident children by telephone or mail, particularly with older children, because older children have more competing demands on their time (Cooksey and Craig, 1998; Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988). About half the fathers in this sample communicated with their children in this manner during the six months prior to the survey.

Finally, because data on frequency of visits were collected from noncustodial parents at random assignment as well as at the 12-month follow-up point, it is possible to assess whether control group members showed any change in visitation patterns during the 12 months after random assignment. Analyses not shown in the table indicate that there was very little change in the frequency of visits, suggesting that these families were indeed in a period of relative stability in terms of visitation patterns.

These data point to the challenge facing the PFS program: noncustodial fathers are a heterogeneous group and may require quite different approaches to try to increase their involvement. One group (about 20 percent) did not see their children for over a year; another group (about half) saw their children sometimes, but not weekly; and a third group (the remaining 30 percent) saw their children weekly. Such varying levels of contact are consistent with previous research (although not with conventional assumptions that never-married fathers see very little of their children).[13]

B. Impacts of PFS on Frequency and Types of Contact

The PFS program did not change the frequency or length of visits between noncustodial parents and their children. This finding appears consistent with recent research indicating that patterns of visitation are quite difficult to change, particularly for families who have lived apart for several years (Pearson and Thoennes, 1998; Seltzer, 1998). A significant fraction of fathers in the sample were already visiting their children fairly regularly, while the remainder may have had patterns of interaction that were quite entrenched. (Subgroup analyses will be presented later to

[12]The proportion visiting at least weekly is somewhat lower than expected, given that 38 percent of never-married custodial parents in the NSFH reported that their children saw the noncustodial parent at least weekly (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Note, however, that these measures are not fully comparable, because PFS frequency of visits is measured over the past six months, while the other survey asks about the past year.

[13]While children of never-married parents are somewhat less likely than children of divorced parents to *ever* see their fathers, those who do see their fathers are more likely to see them at least weekly (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994).

determine whether visitation patterns were universally resistant to change or whether father-child contact was affected by the PFS intervention in some types of families.)

Respondents to the smaller noncustodial parent survey were asked not only about the frequency of visits (reported in Appendix Table B) but also about the types of activities in which they engaged with their children. For example, noncustodial parents were asked whether they read to their young children and participated in movies, sports, picnics, and religious or school activities together. Program impacts on these types of activities are presented in the last panel of Table 3.3. The only activity to increase by a statistically significant amount is religious activities; members of the program group were 14.7 percentage points more likely to state that they engaged in these activities with their children than members of the control group.

Religious activities may have been of particular interest to the noncustodial parents, both because they reported high levels of religiosity and because it does not generally cost any money to participate in them. Peer group facilitators often specifically encouraged these fathers to look for positive and productive ways to spend time with their children without necessarily having to spend any money. In fact, as discussed in other research on PFS (see Johnson, Levine, and Doolittle, 1999), many of the men in PFS found the church a source of support and strength in their daily lives. Note, however, that this is one of the few dimensions in which impacts are measured using noncustodial parent responses to the survey. It is possible that the program may have socialized participants to give different responses than control group members (particularly because some peer group facilitators were quite religious themselves).

It is possible that even if PFS did not affect frequency of visits, it might have affected some characteristics that might provide a foundation for visiting, leading to the possibility of longer-term effects on visits. However, among factors thought to influence visitation (for example, having a legal visitation agreement in place, the father's level of interest in visiting frequently, and the distance the father lived from the child), there are no differences between the PFS program group and the control group.

Overall, then, PFS may have somewhat affected elements of visitation that the noncustodial father had some control over (the kinds of activities that he and the child engaged in together), but it did not affect the component that requires the acquiescence of the custodial parent (frequency of contact). Ethnographic research conducted as part of the project helps to shed some light on these limited impacts. Noncustodial parents who participated in the program frequently mentioned that difficulties in resolving conflicts over visitation were a source of frustration. "The noncustodial parent in the program starts internally incorporating the messages of the peer support group and decides that he would like to see his children, or see them more regularly. Now willing to participate in visitation, the NCP feels frustrated and angry when the program is unable to get the custodial parent to cooperate in the process . . ." (Johnson, Levine, and Doolittle, 1999, p. 277).

Interestingly, both Pearson and Thoennes (1998) and field interviews conducted during PFS indicate that there is a high degree of interest among noncustodial parents in gaining increased access through legal assistance, a service that was not formally offered by PFS. In fact, interventions that give assistance in gaining more specificity in legal visitation agreements do show some promise for helping to increase the frequency of father-child contact. In contrast, programs like PFS that rely on the custodial parent's voluntary cooperation with the noncustodial

parent or on voluntary participation in mediation may be limited in their capacity to produce change, since custodial parents are reportedly not enthusiastic about interventions aimed at increasing access (Pearson and Thoennes, 1998).

Finally, the lack of impacts on frequency of contact sheds light on an important question for policymakers — whether increased enforcement of formal child support payments will lead to increased contact between fathers and children.[14] PFS did affect the proportion of fathers making formal payments but did not affect levels of contact with their children. At least for this set of families, who had very low incomes and were typically several years into the separation process, changes in formal child support payments alone may not have had much immediate effect on levels of visitation. Caution should be used in extrapolating from this finding to the larger population of nonresident fathers, however, because the fathers in this sample had very little disposable income and the program had limited effects on their earnings, leaving little room for changes in formal payments that would be large enough to affect other aspects of their relationships.[15] Thus, the relationship between payments and visits may be quite different for low-income samples than for noncustodial parents with higher incomes who present a wider range of possible payment levels.

IV. Noncustodial Parents' Involvement in Child-Rearing

Table 3.4 presents findings about the noncustodial parents' involvement in child-rearing in ways not captured by frequency of father-child contact, including the frequency with which the parents discussed the child, the noncustodial parents' level of involvement in child-rearing decisions, and the custodial parents' rating of whether the father had improved as a parent over the past 12 months.

A. Levels of Involvement in Child-Rearing for Control Group Members

Not surprisingly, the frequency with which the custodial parent and noncustodial parent interacted is closely related to the frequency of visitation. Even in the absence of the PFS program, there was a substantial amount of contact between the parents. Nearly three-quarters (72.7 percent) of control group parents spoke with one another at some time in the six months before the survey, and 43.8 percent of custodial parents reported discussing the child with the noncustodial parent at least once per month during that period. A much smaller proportion of custodial parents (27.4 percent) reported that the noncustodial parent had at least some involvement in major decisions about the child. Thus, a sizable number of custodial parents drew a distinction between talking with the noncustodial parent and considering him a partner in child-rearing decisions.

As shown in Appendix Table B, the matched-pairs sample demonstrates the same kind of discrepancies in reporting for these parenting measures as is the case for frequency of father-child contact. Noncustodial parents were more likely to report that the parents discussed the child at least once per month (54.2 percent of noncustodial parents versus 39.1 percent of custodial

[14]The economic perspective is that fathers who invest more financially in their children have an incentive to become involved in other ways as well, to protect their investment. An alternative hypothesis is that custodial parents are more likely to welcome noncustodial parents who are making child support payments than those who are not.

[15]The authors are grateful to Judith Seltzer for this helpful cautionary note about interpreting the findings.

Table 3.4
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Noncustodial Parents' Parenting Influence and Custodial Parent/ Noncustodial Parent Conflict During the Six Months Prior to Survey[a]

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
NCP involvement in child-rearing (reported by CP)			
CP spoke to NCP in past 6 months	74.4	72.7	1.7
CP discussed child with NCP at least once per month	43.5	43.8	-0.3
NCP has any involvement in major decisions	27.6	27.4	0.2
NCP has made any improvement as parent	29.4	28.5	0.9
CP/NCP relationship (reported by CP)			
Parents' relationship is friendly	34.3	34.7	-0.4
Frequency of disagreement			
CP reports frequent disagreements[b]	32.6	29.1	3.5 *
CP has spoken to NCP in past 6 months and they disagreed a great deal about:			
Child residence	4.7	2.4	2.3 ***
Child-rearing	5.2	3.2	2.0 **
How NCP spends money on child	18.9	17.6	1.4
How child support is spent	11.1	8.8	2.3
Amount of child support	13.8	12.1	1.7
Frequency of NCP visits	13.9	13.8	0.1
Activities during visits	9.1	8.8	0.3
Other child-related issues	6.6	6.0	0.7
Non-child-related issues	7	6.0	1.0
Style of conflict			
CP reports that she and NCP disagree and they ever react in the following ways:			
Keep opinions to self	30.6	29.7	0.9
Discuss disagreements calmly	43.0	43.3	-0.2
Argue loudly or shout at each other	35.9	34.3	1.6
Hit or throw things at each other	5.4	5.7	-0.3
CP reports aggressive conflict[c]	13.1	12.7	0.5
CP has had a restraining order against NCP during prior six months	6.5	6.2	0.3
Sample size (total=2,005)	991	1,014	

(continued)

Table 3.4 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the custodial parent survey.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a] "Six months prior to the survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post-random assignment.

[b] Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent disagreed "a great deal" on at least one topic.

[c] Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent "often or always shout at each other" or "ever throw things at each other."

parents in the matched-pairs sample). Even wider is the gap between the proportion of noncustodial parents who believed that they had at least some involvement in major decisions about the child (52.3 percent) and the proportion of custodial parents who agreed with that assessment (27.7 percent).

B. Impacts of PFS on Noncustodial Parents' Involvement in Child-Rearing

Even though the program did not affect noncustodial fathers' frequency of contact with their children, it could still have affected their involvement in child-rearing. However, PFS did not affect the overall likelihood that the parents spoke to each other in the six months leading up to the survey, the frequency with which they discussed the child, the likelihood that the noncustodial parent was involved in major decisions about the child, or the likelihood that the custodial parent reported any improvement in the noncustodial father's role as a parent. Again, the subgroup analysis will shed light on whether the program might have affected some kinds of families, even though it did not affect outcomes for the sample in aggregate.

V. Conflict Between Custodial and Noncustodial Parents

A. Levels of Conflict for Control Group Members

Table 3.4 also presents information on levels of conflict between custodial and noncustodial parents. The first set of relationship results indicates the *frequency of disagreement* between the parents. Here, the levels of conflict could be interpreted as "a glass half full or half empty." Over 70 percent of parents in the control group spoke to each other in the past six months, yet only 29.1 percent experienced a high frequency of conflict by disagreeing "a great deal" about one or more topics listed.[16] Thus, while a significant minority of the parents disagreed frequently, most of those parents who chose to interact did *not* have frequent disagreements — despite the tensions inherent in their circumstances. Among those with a high frequency of disagreement, the most frequent sources of conflict were about how the noncustodial parent spent money on the child, about how child support was spent, about the amount of child support, and about the frequency of visits between the noncustodial parent and the child.

This pattern of relatively low frequency of conflict and a low proportion of custodial parents who considered the noncustodial parent to be involved in major decisions suggests that, like many middle-class divorced or separated parents, parents in the PFS sample tended to engage in what has been called "parallel parenting" rather than collaborative parenting. That is, rather than interacting with one another to jointly make decisions on behalf of the child, each parent engaged with the child individually. This strategy may have helped the parents to avoid conflict (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985).

The second set of relationship results in Table 3.4 indicates the *style of conflict* between the parents. This measure is of particular interest, because of the concern that increased enforcement efforts might intensify conflict between parents. For children, this measure of conflict has different implications than the frequency of disagreement. Whereas increased frequency of dis-

[16]A lower proportion of the PFS sample reported frequent disagreements than in a sample from the NSFH (Seltzer, 1998), in which 39 percent of parents living apart had frequent disagreements. However, this NSFH sample is composed of recently separated or divorced parents.

agreement could for some families be a positive development (because it at least indicates that the parents are engaged in the difficult job of co-parenting), any increase in *aggressive conflict* would be seen as unambiguously negative.

Over one-third of parents (34.3 percent) reported that they "ever argue loudly or shout at each other," and 5.7 percent reported that they "ever hit or throw things at each other." About 12.7 percent of parents fell into the composite category of experiencing aggressive conflict, which includes those who "often or always shout at each other" *or* "ever throw things at each other." This proportion is considerably lower than presented in other research; in the National Survey of Families and Households, 49 percent of recently separated or divorced parents experienced aggressive conflict (Seltzer, 1998). The PFS sample may have lower rates of aggressive conflict because the parents were living apart longer and therefore had less volatile relationships. In addition, the NSFH measure categorizes families as having aggressive conflict if either parent reported such conflict, while the PFS measure relies only on custodial parent reports.

As shown in Appendix Table B, noncustodial parents in the smaller matched-pairs sample perceived the levels of conflict to be lower than reported by the custodial parents. The noncustodial parents more often reported that the relationship was friendly, and they less often reported that it involved frequent disagreements or aggressive styles of conflict.

B. Effects of PFS on Parents' Conflict

Even though, as reported above, PFS did not affect the amount of interaction between parents, it did cause a small increase in the proportion of custodial parents who reported frequent disagreements. Overall, those who reported a high frequency of conflict rose from 29.1 to 32.6 percent, an increase of 3.5 percentage points. In particular, there was an increase in the proportion who reported that they and the noncustodial parent "disagreed a great deal" about where the child lived or how the child was being raised.

Interestingly, this small increase in disagreements was not accompanied by a decrease in the proportion of custodial parents who described their relationship as friendly. Either the increase in disagreements occurred among couples who would have already described their relationship as "neutral or unfriendly," or custodial parents were able to distinguish between parental differences of opinion and the overall tone of the relationship.

That the increase in disagreements centered on child-rearing and residence — topics that were not common areas of disagreement for the control group — might suggest that some noncustodial parents in the program group were trying to become more involved in new areas of decision-making about the child. The increased disagreement either may be inherent in the noncustodial parents' becoming more involved or may indicate that the custodial parents were resistant to this increased interest in parenting. (This is consistent with the finding that, at the 12-month follow-up point, custodial parents did not report that noncustodial parents in the program group had any more involvement in major parenting decisions than did noncustodial parents in the control group.)

On the positive side, despite a small increase in frequency of disagreements, there was no increase in the overall proportion of custodial parents who reported aggressive styles of conflict. Neither was there any increase in the proportion of custodial parents who had a restraining order

in place against the noncustodial parent. Thus, although the program may have exacerbated tensions for a very small proportion of parents, increased enforcement and encouragement of noncustodial parents to become more involved in their children's lives do not appear to have increased the incidence of domestic violence for program group members.

The pattern of results for child support, father-child contact, and parental conflict can help to shed light on how the PFS intervention might have caused increases in conflict. It has been hypothesized previously that increases in formal payments brought about by increased enforcement could lead noncustodial parents to want increased contact with the child; in turn, increased father-child contact could lead to more opportunity for conflict between the parents. However, PFS produced an increase in the likelihood of formal payments (and, for the survey sample, an increase in average payments) and an increase in the frequency of disagreements between the parents, with no increase in the frequency of visits. Thus, it appears that if the increase in formal payments led to the slight increase in parental conflict, it did so primarily *within the amount of father-child contact that was already occurring*, not by changing the amount of contact.

VI. Conclusions from the Overall Custodial Parent Survey Sample

Noncustodial fathers in the PFS control group demonstrated widely varying levels of involvement with their children during the 12 months after entering the program. About two-thirds provided any form of financial support — about two-fifths providing any formal child support, and a similar proportion providing any informal financial support — during the six months prior to the 12-month follow-up survey. Most noncustodial parents (about 70 percent) saw their child at least once during the six months prior to the survey. In addition, nearly half of noncustodial parents visited their children at least once a month, and about 30 percent visited at least weekly (according to custodial parent reports). Given this heterogeneity of family relationships, program designers and operators of this type of intervention need to develop a range of specific strategies for supporting fathers' efforts to be involved, which can be applied to different families depending on their circumstances.

For the overall custodial parent survey sample, PFS affected the provision of formal support but had few effects on other, nonfinancial forms of involvement by noncustodial parents. PFS raised the likelihood that noncustodial parents would provide formal support without decreasing their likelihood of providing some informal support. Increases in the value of formal support paid, however, were partly offset by decreases in the value of informal support paid. Although custodial parents did not report increases in father-child contact or in fathers' involvement in child-rearing, there was a small increase in the frequency of disagreements between the parents — an indication that noncustodial fathers may have been attempting to become more active parents.

Chapter 4

Effects of Parents' Fair Share on Fathers' Involvement, by Subgroup and Site

The next set of analyses examines whether there were particular types of families for whom PFS had more positive or more negative effects than indicated for the sample as a whole. A variety of family characteristics has been found in previous research to be associated with levels of paternal involvement. How did these characteristics affect levels of involvement for the control group in the population served by PFS? Did any of these characteristics help to identify families who were more responsive or less responsive to the PFS intervention?

Section I describes the methods used for subgroup analysis. Then Section II previews the key results by subgroup and site, focusing on their implications for policymakers and program designers. Finally, Section III describes in detail the results for each subgroup and site.

I. Methods for Subgroup Analysis

To retain the validity of the experimental design requires that subgroups be defined by characteristics that are measured at baseline. If subgroups were formed based on data collected after random assignment, the treatment might affect the proportion of program group members who fall into each subgroup, making the program and control group members systematically different.

In the case of PFS, baseline data sources include child support enforcement (CSE) administrative records, Unemployment Insurance (UI) earnings records, and a brief Background Information Form (BIF) that noncustodial parents filled out at the time of enrollment. However, there are some subgroup variables of theoretical interest that are available only on the 12-month surveys. Such subgroups are presented below, as long as they met the condition that there be no program impact on a parent's likelihood of being included in that subgroup, so that equal proportions of program and control group members fell into the subgroup at the time of the 12-month survey. Even with this restriction, when subgroups presented in the tables for this chapter are defined using 12-month survey data, the results are shown in italics to distinguish them from "pure" experimental analyses.

Subgroup analyses are conducted by defining mutually exclusive subgroups and estimating impacts separately for each of them. Thus, a comparison of the size of the impacts reported for two subgroups (for example, those who were previously married and those who were not) *does not control for other background characteristics which may be correlated with being in each subgroup.* This method of conducting subgroup analyses allows one to ask, "How did the program affect those who were previously married, and how did it affect those who were not?" This is useful information for making decisions about targeting the program to particular subgroups that would be definable at intake, or for determining whether changes should be made in the mix of services offered to specific subgroups. However, this method of subgroup analysis does not, by itself, allow one to determine whether the parents' marital status *caused* the program

to have the impact reported, because it does not attempt to control for other characteristics that may be correlated with being in that demographic subgroup.

II. Preview of Key Results by Subgroup and Site

The analyses that follow show that the impacts of PFS do vary significantly depending on the characteristics of the family and depending on the site in which the program was implemented. While the subgroup analyses often rely on relatively small samples and should therefore be interpreted with some caution, they do offer insights on the following issues that may be helpful to the designers and operators of future interventions.

Early intervention. The results for the youngest children reveal that although targeting recently separated families with PFS-type intervention holds some promise, programs using such a strategy should also recognize that such families may be more likely to experience an increase in aggressive conflict. Families with the youngest children experienced an increase in discussions between the parents that was not seen for the sample as a whole, suggesting that noncustodial parents with the youngest children were responsive to increasing their engagement in parenting. However, this response was accompanied by increases in conflict, including aggressive conflict, between the parents.

The subgroup analysis provides conflicting evidence on whether increases in noncustodial parents' involvement are causally related to increased aggressive conflict between the parents. Families with the youngest children showed increases in both parental discussions and aggressive conflict, and the only demographic subgroup to show an increase in ever visiting the child — noncustodial parents with no high school diploma — also showed an increase in aggressive conflict. This supports the idea that, in some families, there may be a connection between increased parenting activity and an increase in aggressive conflict between the parents. However, in the two *sites* that managed to increase frequency of visitation, there was no significant increase in aggressive conflict.

Preventing reductions in informal payments as formal payments increase. The analyses for subgroups and for sites shed light on the question of whether there is an inevitable tradeoff between increases in noncustodial parents' formal child support payments and decreases in their informal contributions. Perhaps most striking is the inconsistency in the relationship between these two types of impacts. One possible explanation for this inconsistency is that informal support payments are subject to additional measurement error because it is likely to be difficult for mothers to estimate the value of informal payments, whereas formal payments were calculated from child support enforcement records. In some cases, subgroups or sites that had statistically significant impacts on the amount of formal payments also showed a decrease in informal payments, but just as often the impacts on these two forms of support do not move together. Thus, reductions in informal payments were not a universal reaction to increases in formal payments. Moreover, it appears that not all reductions in informal payments were caused by increases in formal payments.

The results also indicate that among noncustodial parents who had some earnings just prior to random assignment, there were no reductions in informal payments. Such reductions occurred only for those noncustodial parents who had no earnings in the nine months before ran-

dom assignment. Thus, interventions that succeed at substantially improving noncustodal parents' earnings might help families to avoid reductions in informal payments.

Moreover, informal payments appear particularly likely to be reduced by those noncustodial parents who, in the absence of the program, provided the highest levels of informal support. (This includes those with the youngest children, those with high levels of involvement, and younger fathers.) While it is not clear why the program would lead to these reductions (which were sometimes but not always accompanied by increases in the value of formal payments), these results point toward a need for programs not only to provide support for fathers who need to improve their connection to their children, but also to develop creative ways to encourage and help fathers who are providing higher than average contributions to maintain their support.

Strategies for improving impacts on visitation. The site analyses suggest that PFS-type interventions can have positive impacts on the occurrence of regular visitation if targeted to families with relatively low visitation rates. The two sites in which custodial parents reported the lowest visitation levels were the sites which were able to increase the likelihood that noncustodial parents would visit their children at least monthly. Similarly, the subgroup analyses also provide some evidence that effects on visitation were larger for families in which the parents had little relationship and the noncustodial parent rarely visited the child, prior to his assignment to PFS.

Understanding increases in frequency of disagreement. The increases in parental disagreement that were observed for the whole sample were concentrated solely in the two sites that had the highest rates of visitation (and low rates of disagreement) at the outset. This pattern generally held not only for sites but also for subgroups with high rates of visitation, such as those with the youngest children and those who were visiting at least monthly at baseline. These results suggest that for populations with already high levels of visitation, noncustodial parents' efforts to become even more engaged with their children led to an increase in conflict between the parents.[1] Note, however, that although increased visitation does not underlie the small increase in disagreements for the overall sample, increases in visits and in disagreements or aggressive conflict may go hand in hand for some subgroups.

Unequal distribution of impacts across custodial parents of different income levels. The subgroup analyses suggest that the effects of PFS measured in this report are most positive for children in custodial parent families with the highest income levels. They experienced increases in the likelihood of any informal contributions from the noncustodial parent, as well as increases in the frequency of visitation (although these signs of increased involvement were accompanied by increases in the frequency of parental disagreements).

Differing impacts for noncustodial parents with different levels of education. PFS had quite different effects for noncustodial parents who did not have a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate than for those who did have a credential.

[1]Interestingly, though, disagreements did not increase for the subgroup with exceptionally high rates of involvement — those who visited their children at least weekly at baseline *and* whose relationship with the custodial parent was "friendly."

The program produced more positive impacts on the likelihood of making any informal contributions among those without a credential than among those with a credential. For those without a credential, it also increased the likelihood that any visits would occur during the six months of follow-up. This suggests that the program's efforts to inform the noncustodial parents about their rights and how to gain access to their children may have been most effective for those who understood the system least well initially. At the same time, it is important that this subgroup — one of only two subgroups to show increases in any contact with their children — also showed an increase in aggressive conflict, and programs should continue their efforts to address that issue. (In contrast, for noncustodial parents with a high school diploma, there were significant decreases in the likelihood that any visits would occur.)

III. Detailed Findings by Subgroup and Site

Following is a discussion of the findings for each subgroup and site examined. For each set of subgroups, the discussion proceeds in this order: (1) whether control group levels of formal support vary significantly across the subgroup categories; (2) whether control group levels of informal support and nonfinancial forms of involvement vary across the subgroups; (3) whether the program's impacts on formal support vary across the subgroups; and finally (4) whether the program's impacts on informal support and nonfinancial forms of involvement vary across the subgroups.

Each of the subgroup tables in this chapter shows the results of two types of significance tests. The first type of test, presented in earlier tables as well, simply shows whether each individual program impact is statistically significant. This answers, for example, the question "Did the program have an effect on this outcome for noncustodial parents whose children were under age 3?" The second type of significance test, shown in the final column of each table, indicates whether the impacts presented for the subgroups are estimated to be significantly different from *one another,*[2] answering the question "Did the program have different effects for families whose children were of different ages?" In some cases, the program may have had a statistically significant effect for one particular subgroup, but there is no statistically significant difference in the size of the impacts across the subgroups. In the discussion that follows, and in drawing conclusions about the main implications of the subgroup and site results, the focus is on those impacts that do differ significantly across subgroups.

A. Did the Effects of PFS Depend on the Child's Age?

Recent work using national data has suggested that noncustodial parents' involvement declines sharply during the first two years after a family's separation and then plateaus for a number of years (Seltzer, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1998; Seltzer, 1999). This suggests that as time passes after the separation, it may become more difficult to change noncustodial fathers' levels of involvement, because patterns of contact and involvement tend to settle into a relatively stable pattern after a few years. Thus, one might predict that families who have separated recently

[2]Statistical significance across subgroup impacts was tested by comparing each subgroup's impact against the impact for the remainder of the sample. If the impact for at least one subgroup differs from the impact for the remaining sample by a minimum 10 percent level of significance, the difference in subgroup impacts is deemed statistically significant.

may experience larger impacts on informal payments, father-child contact, and other forms of nonfinancial involvement than families who have been separated for many years.

Because the custodial parent survey did not ask how long it had been since the custodial and noncustodial parent separated, a proxy is needed to help establish the length of time since separation.[3] For the half of children whose parents never married or cohabited, the child's age can serve as a reasonable proxy for how long it had been since the child had been separated from the noncustodial parent. (For the other half of the sample — parents who married or cohabited — the age of the child approximates the *maximum* number of years that the couple could have been estranged, serving as a better proxy for younger children than older ones.) Thus, Table 4.1 divides families into four subgroups based on the age of the focal child at random assignment.

In brief, the findings presented in Table 4.1 indicate that many of the program's effects did depend on the child's age. For formal support, the impacts of PFS on the likelihood of paying and on the amount paid are largest for children age 12 and over. For informal financial support, impacts do not show consistent patterns by age. However, it appears that noncustodial parents of the youngest children were most likely to try to increase their engagement in parenting, resulting in increased discussions between the parents as well as increased conflict.

Levels of involvement for the control group. For members of the control group, the proportion of noncustodial parents who made formal support payments shows no consistent trend across age subgroups, ranging from 41.6 percent for children under age 3 to 37.6 percent for children age 12 or older. However, the average *amount* of formal support is higher for the children in the two older age subgroups, presumably because older children were associated with noncustodial parents who were later in their lifetime earnings trajectory and had higher earnings.

In sharp contrast to formal support, the proportion of noncustodial parents in the control group who made informal contributions declines steadily, from 55.7 percent for the youngest children to 18.3 percent for those who were at least age 12 at baseline. The average amount of informal contributions also declines as children age, dropping precipitously for the oldest children (average payments for children under age 3 are $264, compared with $22 for children 12 or older, over six months). Similarly, all the measures of nonfinancial involvement — the frequency of visits and discussions, parental conflict, and the likelihood of aggressive conflict — decline as the age of the child rises.

PFS impacts. Impacts on the likelihood of paying formal support and on the amount paid do not show a consistent pattern across all four age subgroups. However, noncustodial parents whose children were the oldest show the largest impacts on both measures of formal support and are the only ones for whom the impacts on both measures of formal support are statistically significant.

[3]Neither were parents asked whether or not they were still involved in a relationship with one another. Such questions may be very sensitive for custodial parents who are still receiving welfare, and so they were not asked, in an attempt to avoid "break-offs" in which an angry respondent refuses to finish the interview.

Table 4.1
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Noncustodial Parent Involvement During the Six Months Prior to Survey,[a] by Age of the Child[b]

Age of Child at Baseline	Child Is Under Age 3			Child Is Age 3-5		
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
Financial support						
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[c]	49.4	41.6	7.8 *	48.3	43.8	4.5
Paid informal support to CP (%)[d]	61.5	55.7	5.8	43.1	45.5	-2.3
Average formal support to CSE ($)[c]	241	283	-42	409	253	156 **
Average informal support to CP ($)[d]	190	264	-74 **	105	123	-17
Nonfinancial involvement (%)						
NCP ever visited child	83.3	82.3	1.0	75.3	72.2	3.2
NCP and child visit at least once per month	67.6	63.4	4.2	51.6	48.1	3.5
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	69.9	62.5	7.4 *	45.2	44.0	1.1
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[e]	46.4	32.7	13.7 ***	34.1	36.3	-2.2
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[f]	21.9	14.8	7.1 **	14.8	14.5	0.4
Sample size (total=1,992)	249	258		286	308	

Age of Child at Baseline	Child Is Age 6-11			Child Is Age 12 or Older			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Significant Difference in Impacts?
Financial support							
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[c]	53.3	46.6	6.7 *	49.7	37.6	12.1 **	
Paid informal support to CP (%)[d]	32.1	37.0	-4.9	23.7	18.3	5.4	
Average formal support to CSE ($)[c]	377	347	30	682	389	293 ***	Yes
Average informal support to CP ($)[d]	80	143	-63 **	57	22	35	Yes
Nonfinancial involvement (%)							
NCP ever visited child	63.1	64.7	-1.6	48.7	60.0	-11.2 **	Yes
NCP and child visit at least once per month	39.4	41.0	-1.6	24.1	23.6	0.5	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	32.4	39.8	-7.4 *	20.8	20.0	0.8	Yes
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[e]	29.6	24.7	4.9	14.9	17.9	-3.1	Yes
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[f]	7.3	11.2	-3.8	7.2	8.9	-1.7	Yes
Sample size (total=1,992)	299	305		151	136		

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from child support enforcement (CSE) payment records, PFS Background Information Forms, and the custodial parent survey.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

Baseline refers to the month of random assignment.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a]"Six months prior to the survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post-random assignment.

[b]"Child" refers to the focal child for the survey, the youngest child on the case for whom the noncustodial parent was called into a hearing and eventually referred to PFS.

[c]Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. They are measured using administrative records rather than survey responses.

[d]Informal support includes informal cash payments and in-kind support provided by the noncustodial parent directly to the custodial parent.

[e]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent disagreed "a great deal" on at least one topic.

[f]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent "often or always shout at each other" or "ever throw things at each other."

Similarly, the impacts on informal financial support do not show a consistent trend by the age of the child. However, it is important to recognize that the two subgroups that exhibit a statistically significant decline in the amount of informal support paid — children under age 3 and between ages 6 and 11 — are *not* the subgroups that experienced increases in the amount of formal support paid. This suggests that at least some of the program's negative effects on informal payments were not simply the result of noncustodial parents' substituting formal for informal support. If that had been the case, declines would have been expected in informal payments for the same families who show increases in formal payments.

For the youngest children, PFS led to effects on the frequency with which the parents discussed the child and effects on both measures of conflict between the parents — nonfinancial forms of involvement that do not show impacts in the PFS sample as a whole. This is consistent with the hypothesis that noncustodial parents may be most responsive to intervention soon after separation, but it also suggests that translating such responsiveness into effects that are unambiguously positive for children is a challenge for future programs.

Among these youngest children — nearly two-thirds of whom already visited their fathers at least monthly — PFS did not change the amount of contact. However, the program did lead to an increase in the proportion of noncustodial parents who discussed their child with the custodial parent at least once per month (7.4 percentage points), an increase in the proportion who reported frequent conflict (13.7 percentage points), and an increase in the proportion who reported that aggressive conflict occurred (7.1 percentage points). This is the only age subgroup that shows an increase in aggressive conflict, which is consistent with literature on family separation that suggests that conflict is highest, and most volatile, close to the time of separation. It seems plausible that, for the youngest subgroup, the increase in discussions is related to the increase in frequency of conflict and aggressive conflict. Therefore, although noncustodial parents in recently separated families may be responsive to intervention, caution is warranted for families in which fathers' attempts to become more active parents could increase family conflict and, potentially, the risk of domestic violence.

For children age 3 or older, PFS affected fewer measures of nonfinancial involvement. However, among children age 6-11, the program led to a statistically significant (7.4 percentage point) decrease in the proportion of parents who had discussed the focal child; and for children age 12 or older, there is an 11.2 percentage point decrease in the proportion of noncustodial parents who visited their child in the past six months. The cause of these effects is not clear.[4]

B. Did the Effects of PFS Depend on the Relationships Among the Father, the Child, and the Mother?

As noted earlier, both the qualitative interviews and the survey results make clear that the families in the PFS sample span a broad spectrum of relationships, ranging from a small proportion of parents who lived together and were jointly raising their children (perhaps to the ignorance of the welfare and CSE systems) to families in which the noncustodial father had been es-

[4]Although it is possible that noncustodial parents could visit teenagers without the custodial parent's knowing it, the custodial and noncustodial parent reports on whether the father ever visited the child in the past six months are quite similar, even for parents of teenagers. Their reports on exactly how often the noncustodial parent visited are much more divergent.

tranged from his child for years. Perhaps most common are the families who fall in between — those in which the parents had little relationship, or a strained one, but the noncustodial father made some sort of effort to stay involved with his child.

When thinking about the range of relationships that exist among these families, it is easy to forget that the existence of a child support order does not necessarily mean that the parents were no longer involved in an intimate relationship with one another.[5] It is possible either that the custodial parent did not disclose the father's presence when she entered the AFDC system or that the parents subsequently reunited. This is likely to be particularly true for never-married parents receiving public assistance, who may have entered the CSE system because the welfare system required them to, not because the parents had decided to divorce.

As mentioned earlier, families at one end of the spectrum — those in which the parents were living together — were excluded from this analysis because survey questions about informal financial support and nonfinancial involvement would have been difficult for them to answer. However, the analyses do include parents representing a wide range of relationships — from those who were completely out of contact with one another to those who were still romantically involved but did not report that they were currently living together.

PFS may have very different effects for noncustodial parents who began in a position of complete estrangement than for noncustodial parents who were already quite involved with the custodial parent and/or their children. Table 4.2 examines the potential interactions between the PFS program and the rich array of families' relationships in terms of levels of involvement. First, it examines the effects of PFS for families in which the noncustodial father had different levels of contact with his child at baseline. Second, because relationships among all three family members may differentiate families better than simply the level of visitation, the table shows a new measure of family involvement based on the "friendliness" of the parents' relationship as well as the level of father-child contact.

Baseline levels of father-child contact. Frequency of contact between noncustodial fathers and their children at the time of random assignment seems likely to have influenced the ability of the program to affect nonfinancial forms of involvement. For example, for fathers who had little or no contact with their children, the program might have been able to help them establish contact. For those who had some contact but not a regular visitation schedule, the program might have been able to improve the consistency of visits. Finally, for those who already had regular contact, the program might have increased the extent to which the noncustodial parent engaged actively in parenting, without actually changing the quantity of visits.

As shown in Table 4.2, levels of formal support paid by control group members vary surprisingly little by the level of father-child contact reported at baseline. However, as expected, a much closer association exists between the level of contact reported at baseline and the levels of informal support, frequency of visits, and other measures of nonfinancial involvement that were

[5]The authors are grateful to Sara McLanahan and Ron Mincy for comments that deepened our understanding of this issue.

Table 4.2
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Noncustodial Parent Involvement During the Six Months Prior to Survey,[a] by Characteristics of Family Relationships

NCP Baseline Frequency of Visits	NCP Visits with Child Less than Monthly at Baseline			NCP Visits with Child at Least Monthly at Baseline			Significant Difference in Impacts?
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	
Financial support							
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	48.3	43.6	4.7	51.1	43.4	7.7 ***	
Paid informal support to CP (%)[c]	29.0	28.9	0.1	48.6	47.3	1.2	
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	311	344	-33	445	296	149 ***	Yes
Average informal support to CP ($)[c]	66	91	-26	139	176	-37 *	
Nonfinancial involvement (%)							
NCP ever visited child	52.5	50.6	1.9	79.1	80.5	-1.4	
NCP and child visit at least once per month	29.9	29.7	0.2	58.0	54.1	3.9	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	31.2	30.0	1.2	50.9	50.4	0.5	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	22.9	18.9	4.0	38.4	34.1	4.4 *	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	7.5	8.9	-1.4	16.4	14.5	1.9	
Sample size (total=2,004)	357	341		634	672		

NCP Relationship with Child and CP[b]	*Low Involvement: No Contact and Unfriendly*			*Some Involvement: Some Contact or Friendly*			*High Involvement: High Contact and Friendly*			*Significant Difference in Impacts?*
Outcome	*Program Group*	*Control Group*	*Impact*	*Program Group*	*Control Group*	*Impact*	*Program Group*	*Control Group*	*Impact*	
Financial support										
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[c]	*50.0*	*41.7*	*8.3*	*48.2*	*44.2*	*4.0*	*57.1*	*41.7*	*15.4* ***	*Yes*
Paid informal support to CP (%)[d]	*17.9*	*7.5*	*10.4* *	*37.2*	*39.0*	*-1.8*	*74.4*	*73.9*	*0.5*	*Yes*
Average formal support to CSE ($)[c]	*432*	*306*	*126*	*362*	*319*	*43*	*486*	*297*	*189* **	
Average informal support to CP ($)[d]	*33*	*24*	*9*	*87*	*102*	*-16*	*256*	*404*	*-149* ***	*Yes*
Nonfinancial involvement										
NCP ever visited child	*37.3*	*30.2*	*7.1*	*69.4*	*71.8*	*-2.4*	*96.1*	*95.9*	*0.2*	
NCP and child visit at least once per month	*13.6*	*8.3*	*5.3*	*44.3*	*43.3*	*1.0*	*87.1*	*83.7*	*3.5*	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	*11.6*	*10.6*	*1.0*	*39.6*	*38.8*	*0.8*	*83.3*	*84.9*	*-1.6*	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[e]	*16.6*	*16.8*	*-0.1*	*36.6*	*31.5*	*5.1* **	*33.0*	*29.9*	*3.1*	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[f]	*6.1*	*5.3*	*0.8*	*14.8*	*15.2*	*-0.4*	*13.6*	*9.4*	*4.2*	
Sample size (total=2,005)	*158*	*146*		*637*	*665*		*196*	*203*		

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from the custodial parent survey, child support enforcement (CSE) payment records, and PFS Background Information Forms.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses in each site are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

Italics indicate analyses performed on a subgroup not defined by baseline characteristics and which are therefore considered nonexperimental.

Baseline refers to the month of random assignment.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a]"Six months prior to the survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post-random assignment.

[b]"NCP relationship with child and CP" is defined as "high involvement" if the custodial parent reported that she and the noncustodial parent had a friendly relationship, and if at baseline the noncustodial parent reported visiting at least once per week; "low involvement" if the custodial parent reports that she and the noncustodial parent have an unfriendly or no relationship, *and* if at baseline the noncustodial parent reported that the father visited less than once per month. "Some involvement" includes noncustodial parents who are not included in the prior categories.

[c]Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. These are measured using administrative records rather than survey responses.

[d]Informal support includes informal cash payments and in-kind support provided by the noncustodial parent directly to the custodial parent.

[e]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent disagreed "a great deal" on any one topic.

[f]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent "often or always shout at each other" or "ever throw things at each other."

measured one year later.[6] For example, among noncustodial parents who reported visiting at least monthly at baseline, 12 months later 47.3 percent provided at least some informal financial support and 50.4 percent discussed the child with the custodial parent at least monthly, compared with 28.9 and 30 percent, respectively, for parents who didn't report monthly visits at baseline. The finding that baseline visitation has an association with levels of informal support but not with formal support is consistent with other recent work using a welfare sample in which visitation is more closely correlated with informal than formal support (Greene and Moore, 1996).

Surprisingly, the impacts of PFS on the average level of formal support vary by baseline levels of father-child contact, while the impacts on informal financial support do not. Positive impacts on the value of formal payments paid (as well as on the likelihood of making a formal payment) appear only for those fathers who were visiting their child at least monthly at baseline. There are two possible explanations for this pattern. The first is that the CSE authorities are more likely to be able to track the whereabouts and employment status of noncustodial parents who are in regular contact with their children, because the custodial parent, other involved parties, or the noncustodial parent himself is more likely to keep them informed. If this were the main explanation for the pattern of impacts, one might think that the same set of influences should also have caused a correlation between baseline visits and formal payments even in the absence of the program. However, it is possible that as the PFS program targeted the program group for increased enforcement, the noncustodial parent's contact with the custodial parent could in fact have aided the system in its efforts, leading to an interaction between baseline contact and the program's effectiveness at increased enforcement.

The second possibility is that an intervention that emphasizes one's responsibility to participate in the formal CSE system, and the benefits to one's child of doing so, has more resonance among fathers who are already involved with their children. This latter explanation is more consistent with the interpretation that the program's impacts result from noncustodial parents' making a "voluntary" decision to increase formal payments, because of program cajoling rather than enforcement efforts. Since both peer support discussions and increased intensity of enforcement are part of the PFS model, either explanation, or some combination of the two, could hold true.

Finally, the impacts of the program on informal support as well as nonfinancial forms of involvement were not significantly affected by the frequency of visits at baseline. (Although those who visited at least monthly experienced negative impacts on the amount of informal payments as well as positive impacts on the frequency of disagreements, the differences in these *impacts* between noncustodial parents who visited at least monthly and those who did not are small and not statistically significant.)

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[6]However, because the baseline measure of visits was reported by noncustodial parents and the follow-up measure of visitation was reported by custodial parents, the correlations between these reports for the two time periods are not as high as they would be if noncustodial parent responses were used for both periods. In fact, those responses are available for the smaller 12-month survey sample, and noncustodial fathers' estimates of frequency of contact at 12 months are very similar to their baseline responses. Nevertheless, to take advantage of the larger custodial parent survey sample, and to avoid reporting bias based on noncustodial fathers' program status, custodial parent responses are used to measure program impacts.

Noncustodial parent's relationship with child and custodial parent. To distinguish among families based on the relationships among all three family members, the second panel in Table 4.2 divides families into three subgroups: "Low-involvement" families are defined as those in which the custodial parent reported that she had an unfriendly relationship or no relationship with the noncustodial parent and at baseline the noncustodial parent reported visiting the child less than once per month.[7] "High-involvement" families are those in which the custodial parent described her relationship with the noncustodial parent as "friendly" and at baseline he reported visiting the child at least once per week. "Some involvement" includes all other families — those who had some level of friendliness *or* visits that occurred at least once per month but whose involvement did not rise to the very high level of both being friendly and visiting at least once per week.[8]

Note that while this report excludes families in which the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and child, the survey did not inquire about the parents' current relationship other than to ask whether they were friendly or not. It is possible that some of the pairs of parents who reported that they were friendly and had daily visits were still involved in a relationship with one another.[9]

As is true for subgroups defined solely by baseline levels of contact, control group levels of formal child support do not vary much among these categories of family relationships; both the likelihood of paying and the amount of formal support paid are remarkably similar across all three types of families. In contrast, control group levels of informal support, contact, discussion, and disagreement all vary dramatically depending on how the family's relationships were categorized, as one would expect. For example, within the low-involvement subgroup, only 7.5 percent of noncustodial parents made any informal payments in the six months prior to the survey, compared with 73.9 percent of the high-involvement subgroup and 39 percent of the families with "some involvement."

The measures of conflict show complex patterns of variation across the three categories of family relationships. The low-involvement subgroup had the lowest levels of conflict and the lowest likelihood of any aggressive conflict, which is consistent with previous research suggesting that some parents may deliberately avoid contact with one another because they know that such encounters may lead to confrontation. However, conflict did not rise simply with the level of reported involvement. The other higher-involvement subgroups had a similar frequency of disagreements, while the "some involvement" subgroup was more likely to report aggressive conflict than the high-involvement subgroup.

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[7]The initial intention was to define the low-involvement subgroup by limiting the extent of father-child contact even further. However, this approach yielded too small a subgroup to allow for impact analyses — an interesting commentary on the very low proportion of families who were completely estranged and unfriendly.

[8]Although it would have been preferable to define these subgroups entirely using baseline data, no data were available at baseline about the parents' relationship. Thus, these analyses are presented in italics in the table to demonstrate their nonexperimental nature. Note, however, that the program did not affect the likelihood that parents would describe their relationship as "friendly" or "unfriendly."

[9]Interestingly, these subgroup categories have little correlation with the parents' prior marital status, although those who had previously cohabited were slightly more likely to exhibit a "high" level of involvement, and somewhat less likely to exhibit a "low" level of involvement, than those who were ever married or had neither married nor cohabited.

As is true for the subgroups defined by frequency of visits at baseline, the impact of PFS on formal support varies across these three categories of families. However, in this case the impacts on the proportion making any formal payments (rather than the impacts on the value of formal payments) are significantly different. Although all three subgroups show impacts on formal support that are in a positive direction, only for the high-involvement families is the impact large enough to be statistically significant. In fact, they demonstrated a substantial 15.4 percentage point increase in the likelihood that any formal payments would be made, and a $189 average increase in the amount paid.

At the same time, however, the subgroup with the highest levels of involvement also showed a $149 decrease in informal payments, suggesting that for fathers who were already making substantial informal payments in the absence of PFS, the increases in formal payments could indeed result in offsetting reductions in informal payments. It is encouraging, however, that reductions occurred only in the dollar amount of informal payments, not in the proportion making any informal payments, despite the substantial increase in the proportion who were making formal payments.

Finally, Table 4.2 does provide some indication that PFS had more positive effects on levels of informal support for the families who had the most room for improvement — those with the lowest level of involvement in the control group — than for the families with higher involvement. For those who had little involvement in the absence of the program, PFS produced a 10.4 percentage point increase in the likelihood of making any informal contributions, although the average dollar amount of contributions remained very low. In addition, the 7.1 percentage point difference in the likelihood of any visits for this subgroup approached statistical significance, suggesting — together with the impact on providing some informal support — that noncustodial parents in the low-involvement subgroup began to respond. (Note that although the subgroup with "some involvement" shows a statistically significant effect on frequency of disagreements, this impact is not significantly different from those measured for the other two subgroups.)

C. Did the Effects of PFS Depend on the Economic Circumstances of Each Parent?

Noncustodial parent's economic circumstances. To examine the effects of PFS by earnings level, Table 4.3 divides noncustodial parents into three subgroups, each representing one-third of the sample, based on their earnings in the nine months prior to random assignment.[10] As expected based on prior research, the economic circumstances of noncustodial parents are positively related to control group levels of formal payments. The one-third of noncustodial parents who had the lowest earnings were unemployed throughout the nine months prior to random assignment; none of them had earned more than $80 during that period.[11] Of that subgroup, only about one-third of noncustodial parents in the control group paid any formal child support during months 7-12 after random assignment, while 60 percent of those who earned above $3,310 prior to baseline made at least one payment during months 7-12 after random assignment. Similarly, the average amount of formal support paid also increased substantially with earnings.

[10]Earnings are measured for nine months because that is the time period for which earnings information is available for noncustodial parents in all sites.

[11]Note, however, that they may have had earnings from various sources that were not reported to the UI system.

Table 4.3
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Noncustodial Parent Involvement During the Six Months Prior to Survey,[a] by Noncustodial Parent and Custodial Parent Economic Characteristics

NCP Earnings[b]	NCP Earned Less Than $80			NCP Earned $80-$3,310			NCP Earned More than $3,310			Significant Difference in Impacts?
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	
Financial support										
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[c]	38.2	31.7	6.5 *	44.9	37.8	7.1 **	67.1	60.4	6.7 *	
Paid informal support to CP (%)[d]	37.3	43.3	-5.9	42.9	37.9	5.0	44.0	41.8	2.3	Yes
Average formal support to CSE ($)[c]	260	187	73	295	212	83	632	537	95	
Average informal support to CP ($)[d]	94	162	-68 **	100	129	-29	140	152	-12	
Nonfinancial involvement (%)										
NCP ever visited child	66.7	69.3	-2.6	70.1	71.0	-0.9	71.4	70.5	0.9	
NCP and child visit at least once per month	45.0	43.4	1.5	45.8	44.6	1.3	52.5	49.4	3.1	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	40.0	41.4	-1.4	45.7	46.2	-0.5	45.4	43.0	2.4	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[e]	29.5	27.5	2.0	36.6	29.1	7.4 **	32.0	30.0	2.1	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[f]	13.0	10.8	2.2	13.2	12.9	0.3	13.5	14.1	-0.7	
Sample size (total=2,005)	659	307		678	346		668	338		

CP Household Income[g]	*CP Income Less Than $760*			*CP Income $760 - $1,310*			*CP Income More Than $1,310*			*Significant Difference in Impacts?*
Outcome	*Program Group*	*Control Group*	*Impact*	*Program Group*	*Control Group*	*Impact*	*Program Group*	*Control Group*	*Impact*	
Financial support										
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[c]	*48.3*	*44.1*	*4.2*	*49.8*	*43.4*	*6.4 **	*52.2*	*43.0*	*9.2 ****	
Paid informal support to CP (%)[d]	*38.9*	*44.0*	*-5.0*	*40.3*	*42.4*	*-2.1*	*45.0*	*37.0*	*8.0 ***	*Yes*
Average formal support to CSE ($)[c]	*365*	*306*	*59*	*371*	*345*	*26*	*451*	*289*	*162 ****	
Average informal support to CP ($)[d]	*90*	*148*	*-58*	*130*	*151*	*-21*	*117*	*144*	*-27*	
Nonfinancial involvement (%)										
NCP ever visited child	*66.8*	*76.9*	*-10.2 ****	*72.3*	*69.8*	*2.5*	*69.0*	*64.7*	*4.4*	*Yes*
NCP and child visit at least once per month	*46.8*	*54.1*	*-7.3 **	*50.8*	*46.1*	*4.8*	*45.5*	*37.7*	*7.7 ***	*Yes*
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	*45.7*	*48.6*	*-2.9*	*44.0*	*42.5*	*1.5*	*41.5*	*39.7*	*1.8*	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[e]	*29.3*	*29.5*	*-0.2*	*29.1*	*25.4*	*3.7*	*39.5*	*32.3*	*7.2 ***	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[f]	*12.9*	*16.3*	*-3.4*	*13.4*	*9.3*	*4.1*	*13.0*	*12.7*	*0.3*	*Yes*
Sample size (total=2,005)	*662*	*331*		*684*	*327*		*659*	*333*		

(continued)

Table 4.3 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from child support enforcement (CSE) payment records, unemployment insurance (UI) earnings records, PFS Background Information Forms, and the custodial parent survey.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

Italics indicate analyses that were performed on a subgroup not defined by baseline characteristics and which are therefore considered nonexperimental.

Baseline refers to the month of random assignment.

Noncustodial parent earnings and custodial parent household income are divided into three equal quantiles.

The abbreviation NCP refers to noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a]"Six months prior to the survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post-random assignment.

[b]Average monthly earnings for the three quarters prior to baseline. Ranges are rounded to the nearest $10.

[c]Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. These are measured using administrative records rather than survey responses.

[d]Informal support includes informal cash payments and in-kind support provided by the noncustodial parent directly to the custodial parent.

[e]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent disagreed "a great deal" on at least one topic.

[f]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent "often or always shout at each other" or "ever throw things at each other."

[g]Custodial parent household income for the month prior to survey. Ranges are rounded to the nearest $10.

What is remarkable, however, is how little *other* types of involvement — including informal support, frequency of visits, and conflict — vary by the earnings level of noncustodial parents in the control group. For example, the amount of informal child support provided during months 7-12 after random assignment ranges only from $129 to $162, and the proportion of noncustodial parents who visited their children at least monthly hovers between 43 and 49 percent for all three earnings subgroups. This suggests that within the narrow range of earnings exhibited in this sample, noncustodial parents' earnings (at least formal, "above ground" earnings) are much more closely linked to variations in formal child support payments than to variations in informal support and nonfinancial involvement.

Previously it was noted that in the control group, the child's age (and presumably the length of time since the parents had separated) as well as the frequency of visitation at baseline are much more strongly correlated with the provision of informal payments and with nonfinancial forms of involvement than with the provision of formal support. Conversely, Table 4.3 indicates that noncustodial parents' earnings are strongly related to variation in formal support payments but not to variation in informal contributions or other nonfinancial forms of involvement. These bivariate associations between subgroups and outcomes suggest, at least for this very low-income sample, that formal support was determined by a different process than informal support and other, nonfinancial forms of involvement.[12]

Note, however, that while these bivariate relationships are suggestive, multivariate analyses would be needed to draw firm conclusions about the complex causal processes underlying these outcomes. For example, earnings typically rise as young men grow older, whereas noncustodial fathers' involvement with their children tends to decline over time. Therefore, to predict the effects of an incremental change in earnings on visits or other forms of involvement would require analyses that controlled for variables such as the time since the family separated.

Somewhat surprisingly, the program's only impact that varies at a statistically significant level across earnings subgroups is the effect on the likelihood of noncustodial parents' making informal contributions. (Even though no subgroup shows a statistically significant impact on this outcome, the impacts are different enough from one another — with the lowest earners having a negative trend, and the others having a positive one — to make the *differences* in impacts across the subgroups significant.) Although the impacts on the average value of informal support do not vary significantly by subgroup, it is worth noting that, consistent with the pattern of effects on making any informal payments, only the fathers who were unemployed in the nine months prior to random assignment had a significant decrease in informal payments during months 7-12 of follow-up. It may be that, for these destitute men, increased pressure to make formal payments did indeed lead to a tradeoff in which informal contributions were decreased.

Finally, although the program's impacts on frequency of disagreement are concentrated in the middle earnings subgroup, this impact does not differ significantly from the impacts on disagreement for the other two subgroups.

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[12]This conclusion is also supported by the fact that whether or not the noncustodial father had made formal child support payments in the past had little relationship to his levels of informal involvement — including his likelihood of making informal payments, the amount of informal payments, and nonfinancial measures of involvement — at the one-year follow-up point.

Thus, as one might expect, noncustodial parents' financial reactions to the program did differ somewhat based on their initial earnings capacity. The evidence suggests that noncustodial parents with relatively higher earnings capacities may have been less likely to reduce informal payments in reaction to increased enforcement. This implies that if the PFS intervention had increased the earnings of noncustodial parents more substantially, these parents might have decreased their informal payments less.

Custodial parent's household income. PFS could have had different effects for custodial parents of different income levels for two reasons. First, the economic circumstances of the custodial parent might have played a role in determining how noncustodial parents reacted to PFS. A father, for example, might have been more inclined to provide financial support to a custodial parent who was very disadvantaged than to one who, in his opinion, did not need the money. Second, even if the custodial parent's income did not *cause* the noncustodial parent to respond differently to the program, the distribution of the program's impacts on custodial parents of different incomes still might vary in important ways. For example, if the lowest-income noncustodial parents tended to be associated with the lowest-income custodial parents, then the propensity to reduce informal support payments in reaction to PFS would have been most harmful to the poorest custodial parents and children.

To examine this question, Table 4.3 divides the sample of custodial parents into thirds based on their household income in the month prior to the survey. Those in the lowest income subgroup had incomes less than $760; those in the second subgroup had incomes ranging from $760 to $1,310; and those in the highest income subgroup had household incomes of more than $1,310 in the month prior to the survey.

It appears that as a custodial parent's income rose, noncustodial parents in the control group were slightly less likely to provide informal support and to visit the child regularly. It is possible that this association arose not because the income of the custodial parent was higher but rather because custodial parents with higher incomes were more likely to have had a partner or spouse — which, on average, tends to decrease noncustodial parents' involvement and support. (Interestingly, the earnings of the noncustodial parents and the household incomes of custodial parents in this sample have little correlation, suggesting that relationships between the income of custodial parents and the support they received were not driven by the earnings levels of the corresponding noncustodial parents.)

Only one of the program's impacts on noncustodial parents' financial contributions is related to the custodial parents' household income: The highest income subgroup shows a significantly larger impact on the likelihood of receiving any informal support than do the lower subgroups. (Although the impacts on formal support are also different for custodial parents with different household incomes, these impacts are not statistically significant.)

The program's impacts on noncustodial parents' nonfinancial forms of involvement vary more than its effects on their financial support, according to the custodial parents' income level. In particular, children of custodial parents in the lowest income subgroup experienced a 10.2 percentage point decrease in the likelihood that their fathers would ever visit and a 7.3 percentage point decrease in the likelihood that their fathers would visit at least once per month, during months 7-12 of follow-up. Children of custodial parents in the highest income subgroup, in contrast, experienced a 7.7 percentage point increase in the likelihood that their father would visit at

least once per month and a 7.2 percentage point increase in the likelihood that their parents would have frequent disagreements. It is possible that the increase in informal contributions to the highest income subgroup is related to the increases in visitation, but whether one of these impacts actually caused the other is uncertain.

D. Did the Effects of PFS Depend on the Demographic Characteristics of the Noncustodial Parent?

Noncustodial parent's race/ethnicity. Given that the majority of the PFS sample is either African-American or Hispanic — in much larger proportions than for the population of public assistance recipients or noncustodial fathers nationally — it is important to examine whether or not the results achieved by the program appear to have been influenced by the race/ethnicity of research sample members.

Reflecting differences in economic circumstances, the race/ethnicity of control group members is predictive of both their incidence of formal support and their average payment amounts. (See Table 4.4.) African-Americans were least likely to pay, and whites were most likely to pay; Hispanics fell in the middle. The patterns of paying informal support are less straightforward, with Hispanics being slightly more likely to have made any informal contributions but paying less, on average, than African-Americans or whites. In contrast, levels of most nonfinancial types of involvement do not vary substantially for the three subgroups. The largest difference is seen in the frequency of disagreements, which Hispanic custodial parents reported at somewhat lower levels than custodial members of the other two subgroups.

The effects of PFS do vary across the three race/ethnicity subgroups. Most striking is that only Hispanics increased their formal child support payments by a statistically significant amount. This may be partly related to the effectiveness of the Los Angeles site — where a large proportion of Hispanic sample members lived — at achieving impacts on amounts paid. (Site differences in impacts will be described in the next section.) Note that Hispanic sample members did not decrease their already relatively low informal payments, suggesting that the noncustodial parents who increased their formal payments were not necessarily the ones who accounted for reductions in informal payments.

The nonfinancial effects of PFS also vary across race/ethnicity subgroups. The program had greater negative effects on visitation among blacks than among whites and Hispanics, although none of these effects is statistically significant. In addition, only for whites did the program increase the frequency of disagreements.

Noncustodial parent's education. The analysis of levels of involvement by educational status shown in Table 4.4 suggests that the relationship between the program's effectiveness and noncustodial parents' characteristics is complex.

Like their prior earnings, noncustodial parents' educational status appears to be related to control group levels of formal payments but not to informal support or other types of involvement. For example, fathers in the control group who had a high school diploma or GED were somewhat more likely to pay formal support than those with no credential (47.2 and 39.5 percent, respectively), and they made higher average payments ($377 versus $251).

Table 4.4
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Noncustodial Parent Involvement During the Six Months Prior to Survey,[a] by Noncustodial Parent Demographic Characteristics

Outcome	NCP's Ethnicity: African-American Program Group	African-American Control Group	African-American Impact	White Program Group	White Control Group	White Impact	Hispanic Program Group	Hispanic Control Group	Hispanic Impact	Significant Difference in Impacts?
Financial support										
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	45.4	39.4	6.0 **	65.8	55.3	10.5 *	53.9	46.9	7.0	
Paid informal support to CP (%)[c]	38.2	40.0	-1.8	43.9	39.7	4.2	50.4	48.2	2.1	
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	267	271	-4	526	476	50	623	339	284 ***	Yes
Average informal support to CP ($)[c]	116	159	-42 **	82	153	-71 *	105	104	1	
Nonfinancial involvement (%)										
NCP ever visited child	68.0	72.0	-4.0	68.1	65.4	2.6	73.0	70.5	2.5	Yes
NCP and child visit at least once per month	44.6	44.3	0.3	49.1	47.4	1.7	52.5	47.9	4.6	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	44.7	42.7	1.9	39.4	43.7	-4.4	41.9	45.6	-3.7	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	32.0	31.5	0.5	38.8	27.3	11.4 **	27.8	20.7	7.1	Yes
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	12.6	12.4	0.2	15.9	15.0	0.9	13.5	11.5	2.0	
Sample size (total=1,974)	669	697		145	155		157	151		

Outcome	NCP's Educational Level: HS Diploma or GED Program Group	HS Diploma or GED Control Group	HS Diploma or GED Impact	No HS Diploma or GED Program Group	No HS Diploma or GED Control Group	No HS Diploma or GED Impact	Significant Difference in Impacts?
Financial support							
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	53.7	47.2	6.5 **	46.4	39.5	6.8 **	
Paid informal support to CP (%)[c]	38.3	42.2	-3.8	44.9	40.3	4.5	Yes
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	420	377	43	373	251	122 **	
Average informal support to CP ($)[c]	100	151	-51 **	125	145	-20	
Nonfinancial involvement (%)							
NCP ever visited child	65.2	73.7	-8.5 ***	74.1	67.5	6.6 **	Yes
NCP and child visit at least once per month	45.7	45.9	-0.2	49.9	46.1	3.8	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	42.0	43.4	-1.4	45.6	43.9	1.7	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	32.3	29.4	2.9	33.1	28.6	4.5	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	11.8	14.3	-2.5	14.7	11.2	3.5 *	Yes
Sample size (total = 2,004)	528	486		463	527		

(continued)

Table 4.4 (continued)

Outcome	NCP's Age at Baseline: Under 30 — Program Group	Under 30 — Control Group	Under 30 — Impact	30 or Over — Program Group	30 or Over — Control Group	30 or Over — Impact	Significant Difference in Impacts?
Financial support							
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	49.3	43.9	5.3 *	51.0	43.0	8.1 ***	
Paid informal support to CP (%)[c]	48	47	1	34	34	0	
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	332	270	62	474	371	103 *	
Average informal support to CP ($)[c]	129.0	193.0	-64.0 ***	89.0	92.0	-3.0	Yes
Nonfinancial involvement (%)							
NCP ever visited child	76.0	75.1	0.9	61.1	64.3	-3.2	
NCP and child visit at least once per month	54.2	53.2	1.0	39.4	36.7	2.8	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	51.5	51.3	0.2	33.9	33.8	0.2	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	36.6	33.1	3.5	27.7	23.9	3.9	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	14.4	13.4	1	11.6	11.7	0	
Sample size (total=2,005)	549	569		442	445		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from the custodial parent survey; the noncustodial parent survey; child support enforcement (CSE) payment records; and Parents' Fair Share Background Information Forms.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

Baseline refers to the month of random assignment.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a]"Six months prior to the survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post-random assignment.

[b]Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. They are measured using administrative records rather than survey responses.

[c]Informal support includes informal cash payments and in-kind support provided by the noncustodial parent directly to the custodial parent.

[d]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent disagreed "a great deal" on at least one topic.

[e]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent "often or always shout at each other" or "ever throw things at each other."

At the same time, the effects of the program vary substantially by educational level. For example, while both subgroups show similar increases in the likelihood of making any formal payments, the program had more a positive impact on the likelihood of making any informal payments for noncustodial parents with no high school diploma or GED than for those who had a credential. (However, for neither subgroup is the impact statistically significant.) For the subgroup with no diploma, the program also increased both the likelihood of a visit ever taking place and the occurrence of aggressive conflict. Conversely, for those who had a credential at baseline, the program actually reduced the likelihood of visits and, perhaps relatedly, the average informal payments made.

For fathers in the less educated subgroup, these results make some sense. The program might have given them a new understanding of the opportunities for visitation or educated them about the advantages of remaining involved with their children, at the same time increasing the volatility of their relationship with the custodial parent.[13] It is less clear, however, why the program would have had negative effects on visits and informal payments for the better-educated subgroup. In fact, the results for informal support are the opposite of what one would expect, given the finding that only noncustodial parents with the lowest earnings reduced their informal payments.

Noncustodial parent's age. The ethnographic work conducted as part of the PFS Demonstration found that program group members were often at very different points in their lives, depending on their age. Often, somewhat older fathers stated that they were weary of street life and ready to make substantial changes in their relationships, while younger fathers had not yet reached that point. At the same time, younger fathers were more likely to be associated with more recent separations and younger children, perhaps indicating that their relationships were more amenable to change. Thus, it is possible that the age of the noncustodial parent could have affected the likelihood that PFS would make a difference in his involvement with his children, although the direction of that influence is hard to predict.

Dividing noncustodial parents in the control group into those under age 30 and those age 30 or older, Table 4.4 shows that the older fathers were no more likely to make formal payments but that their average payment amounts were higher, probably reflecting their higher earnings potential. Younger fathers were more likely to make informal contributions and in higher average amounts, to visit their children more frequently, to discuss their children more frequently, and to have higher levels of conflict with the custodial parent. Again, these higher levels of informal involvement are not surprising, because younger fathers were likely to have separated more recently from the custodial parent.

Interestingly, however, these differences in levels of involvement led to few differences in program impacts for noncustodial parents. Neither age subgroup became less likely to make any informal payments as a result of PFS. However, the younger fathers (who began the program making higher levels of informal payments but, presumably, with lower earnings to draw on) significantly reduced the value of their informal payments.

[13]It may also be relevant that PFS had larger effects on the earnings of less educated fathers than on the earnings of those with a credential.

Neither age subgroup shows statistically significant impacts for any of the nonfinancial outcomes examined. It is possible that, as discussed above, there were countervailing influences at work: Even though younger men were more likely to be associated with younger children (who did experience an array of impacts on nonfinancial outcomes), at the same time they may have been less ready to become a more active parent.

Other subgroups. Additional subgroups were examined and the results are presented in Appendix C. One result of particular interest is that for the custodial parent survey sample, PFS increased the likelihood of paying formal child support as well as the amount of formal child support paid only when the focal child was male. However, this difference in results for male and female children does not persist when impacts are examined using the full evaluation sample.

E. Did the Impacts of PFS Vary by Site?

The PFS interim report (Doolittle et al., 1998) describes substantial differences in the way that each of the seven sites implemented PFS. Although the majority of sites had strong peer support components, sites produced considerably different participation rates in peer support and mediation — arguably the two components that would most directly affect noncustodial parents' involvement in parenting. (See Table 4.5.)

Table 4.5

Parents' Fair Share

Participation Rates in Peer Support and Mediation, by Site

Site	Peer Support (%)	Mediation (%)
Dayton	57	0
Grand Rapids	61	11
Jacksonville	68	3
Los Angeles	79	0
Memphis	54	3
Springfield	61	0
Trenton	71	0

SOURCE: Doolittle et al., 1998.

To determine whether site differences also affected the array of outcomes of interest in this report, Table 4.6 provides survey results for noncustodial parents' involvement by site. As the 1998 interim report found, and as shown in Table 4.6, the impacts of PFS on the likelihood of paying formal support and on the average amount of payments vary substantially across the sites. Because the final PFS report will provide larger, more inclusive samples from which to draw

Table 4.6
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Noncustodial Parent Involvement During the Six Months Prior to Survey,[a] by Site

Site/Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
Dayton			
Financial support			
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	38.8	31.3	7.5
Paid informal or in-kind support to CP (%)[c]	42.3	51.4	-9.1
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	352	259	93
Average informal or in-kind support to CP ($)[c]	157	139	18
Nonfinancial involvement (%)			
NCP ever visited child	66.4	71.9	-5.5
NCP and child visit at least once per month	48.6	51.0	-2.4
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	45.2	48.1	-2.9
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	33.6	34.9	-1.4
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	16.3	13.2	3.1
Sample size (total=271)	135	136	
Grand Rapids			
Financial support			
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	65.6	51.7	13.9 ***
Paid informal or in-kind support to CP (%)[c]	42.0	39.4	2.6
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	420	296	124
Average informal or in-kind support to CP ($)[c]	111	177	-66 *
Nonfinancial involvement (%)			
NCP ever visited child	73.1	73.9	-0.8
NCP and child visit at least once per month	45.5	49.4	-3.9
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	47.2	48.5	-1.3
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	31.9	34.0	-2.1
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	12.8	15.0	-2.2
Sample size (total=388)	198	190	
Jacksonville			
Financial support			
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	60.7	66.7	-6.0
Paid informal or in-kind support to CP (%)[c]	40.8	34.6	6.2
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	419	545	-125
Average informal or in-kind support to CP ($)[c]	99	195	-96 **
Nonfinancial involvement (%)			
NCP ever visited child	65.2	70.9	-5.7
NCP and child visit at least once per month	33.7	45.7	-12.1 **
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	35.8	40.1	-4.3
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	31.6	31.8	-0.2
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	10.9	12.4	-1.5
Sample size (total=276)	136	140	

(continued)

Table 4.6 (continued)

Site/Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
Los Angeles			
Financial support			
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	44.7	36.6	8.1 *
Paid informal or in-kind support to CP (%)[c]	35.2	30.9	4.2
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	738	354	383 ***
Average informal or in-kind support to CP ($)[c]	80	97	-16
Nonfinancial involvement (%)			
NCP ever visited child	57.3	59.3	-2.0
NCP and child visit at least once per month	44.5	33.5	10.9 **
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	26.3	28.7	-2.4
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	21.4	16.9	4.5
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	9.4	9.0	0.4
Sample size (total=208)	109	99	
Memphis			
Financial support			
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	29.6	18.7	10.8 **
Paid informal or in-kind support to CP (%)[c]	31.9	32.6	-0.7
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	131	78	53
Average informal or in-kind support to CP ($)[c]	90	87	3
Nonfinancial involvement (%)			
NCP ever visited child	65.4	60.8	4.6
NCP and child visit at least once per month	39.8	28.5	11.3 **
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	39.2	32.1	7.0
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	30.5	31.5	-1.0
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	13.7	9.2	4.5
Sample size (total=407)	192	215	
Springfield			
Financial support			
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	55.8	56.5	-0.7
Paid informal or in-kind support to CP (%)[c]	57.6	63.2	-5.6
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	322	458	-136
Average informal or in-kind support to CP ($)[c]	144	178	-34
Nonfinancial involvement (%)			
NCP ever visited child	86.0	83.4	2.6
NCP and child visit at least once per month	69.3	66.9	2.4
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	60.2	64.6	-4.3
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	33.6	21.8	11.8 *
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	12.7	16.0	-3.4
Sample size (total=237)	121	116	

(continued)

Table 4.6 (continued)

Site/Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
Trenton			
Financial support			
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	61.9	51.8	10.1
Paid informal or in-kind support to CP (%)[c]	42.3	45.1	-2.8
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	482	488	-6
Average informal or in-kind support to CP ($)[c]	116	177	-61
Nonfinancial involvement (%)			
NCP ever visited child	74.9	74.3	0.6
NCP and child visit at least once per month	61.2	57.4	3.9
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	55.5	45.6	9.9
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	47.2	26.0	21.3 ***
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	17.1	13.9	3.1
Sample size (total=218)	100	118	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from child support enforcement (CSE) payment records and the custodial parent survey.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the 2,005 remaining observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

Differences in impacts across sites were statistically significant for the following variables; average formal support paid to the custodial parent, NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month, and NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a]"Six months prior to the survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post-random assignment.

[b]Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. These are measured using administrative records rather than survey responses.

[c]Informal support includes informal cash payments and in-kind support provided by the noncustodial parent directly to the custodial parent.

[d]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent disagreed "a great deal" on at least one topic.

[e]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent "often or always shout at each other" or "ever throw things at each other."

conclusions about formal support for each site, results on formal support are provided here primarily for context. In the 1998 interim report, the overall sample showed positive effects on the likelihood of paying formal child support but not on the amount paid. The positive effects were driven by the effects in three sites: Los Angeles, Grand Rapids, and Dayton. The results for the custodial parent survey sample suggest that the same sites show positive trends in impacts on formal payments (although for the Dayton sample the impacts are not statistically significant). In addition, the Memphis survey sample shows a positive impact on the likelihood of paying formal support during months 7-12 after random assignment.

This section focuses on the results for informal support and for nonfinancial involvement, for which the custodial parent survey is the only source of reliable impact information. (Sample sizes in the noncustodial parent survey are too small for analysis by site.) An examination of the major differences in impacts across sites as presented in Table 4.6 can help to illuminate the results that have been presented thus far. Although the sample sizes are small and the results should therefore be interpreted with caution, the results do differ in interesting ways across the sites.

First, the pattern of effects on the amount of informal contributions does not support the idea that increases in formal support will inevitably lead to offsetting decreases in informal support. For Los Angeles, which for this six-month period and this survey sample shows unusually large increases in formal support paid, there is no offsetting decrease in informal payments.[14] For Jacksonville, there is a significant decrease in informal support paid, but no accompanying increase in formal support. Finally, for Grand Rapids, which shows positive but not statistically significant increases in formal support for this time period, there are also offsetting decreases in informal support. With these varied patterns across the three sites, it seems clear that increases in formal support do not *necessarily* lead to decreases in informal support, although evidence from subgroups presented earlier suggests that for the lowest-income noncustodial parents, that kind of tradeoff may occur.

Second, even though the PFS treatment did not produce increases in visitation across the full survey sample, in two sites it did increase the likelihood that children would see their fathers regularly. Los Angeles and Memphis both show statistically significant increases — of 10.9 and 11.3 percentage points, respectively — in the proportion of noncustodial parents having regular (at least monthly) visits with their children.

How did these two sites achieve these increases in visitation, which are considerably more positive than seen in the other sites? Both sites had good peer support components, although that was also the case for most of the other sites in which there was no overall increase in regular visitation. Moreover, as shown in Table 4.5, although Los Angeles had particularly high rates of participation in peer support, Memphis did not. However, the noncustodial parents in Los Angeles and Memphis did have an important characteristic in common — their control group counterparts had lower levels of visitation than in any of the other sites. While the proportion who visited at least monthly is between 45.7 and 66.9 percent for the other five sites, only 33.5 percent of noncustodial parents in Los Angeles visited their children at least monthly, and only

[14]In fact, the survey sample in Los Angeles experienced larger impacts on the amount of formal support paid during this six-month period than did other cohorts in the full Los Angeles sample.

28.5 percent in Memphis did so. This suggests that part of the reason that PFS did not have impacts on visitation is that it did not specifically target families who had low rates of visitation at the outset; in the two sites that did have lower visitation, the program did improve the regularity of visits.[15] (Instead, it targeted parents who were not meeting their formal child support obligations, and it attempted to improve visitation and family relationships under the assumption that these changes might serve as foundations for improving payments.)

Note that for the subgroup and site results to be fully consistent on this point, one would expect the noncustodial parents who visited less than monthly at baseline (presented in Table 4.2) to show positive effects on visitation. Instead, the impacts on frequency of visitation do not vary for subgroups with different frequencies of visitation reported at baseline. However, it may be that measurement error reduced the likelihood that the results would vary for those subgroups. For Table 4.2, the families were categorized according to how the noncustodial parent reported visitation on the Background Information Form, and then the impacts were measured using the custodial parents' reports of how often visitation occurred in months 7-12 of follow-up. However, there is considerable discrepancy between noncustodial and custodial parent reports of visitation, introducing a degree of error that makes it more difficult to categorize families in a way that will be predictive of program impacts. In contrast, in Table 4.6, the data on "existing" levels of visitation rely on control group levels of visitation, which were reported by custodial parents at months 7-12 of follow-up — the same measure used to estimate the impacts on visitation. It is possible that if custodial parent reports could have been used to measure visitation at baseline, subgroups that were defined using that information would show more differentiated impacts than those reported in Table 4.2. Recall that when families are distinguished by both visitation and parental friendliness, the impacts on nonfinancial involvement are more consistent with these site results.

Third, it appears that the increase in frequent disagreements observed for the full survey sample is concentrated in two sites — Springfield and Trenton — that began with *higher than average control group levels of visitation.* (For example, two-thirds of control group members in Springfield were visiting their children at least once a month, compared with a low of 29 percent for the control group in Memphis. Trenton had the second-highest rate of regular visitation, at 57.4 percent.) These two sites also began with somewhat lower than average rates of disagreement; only Los Angeles shows lower rates of frequent disagreement.

A plausible explanation for this pattern of site impacts on disagreement is that within the group of noncustodial parents who were already visiting regularly, some fraction responded to PFS by trying to become more actively involved in parenting decisions, resulting in disagreements. This explanation is consistent with the pattern of findings described, particularly since the topics of disagreement that show statistically significant increases are child residence and child-rearing rather than, for example, frequency of visits.[16] This interpretation of the impacts is also

[15]On the other hand, it is not clear why the sample in one site, Jacksonville, which began with an average frequency of visits relative to other sites, shows a decrease in regularity of visits. In that site, informal support decreased even though there was no increase (potentially a decrease) in formal support. This provides additional support for the idea that regular visits and informal support may be linked.

[16]If, for example, frequency of visits had been the primary topic of disagreement, it might have indicated that the increase in disagreements occurred among noncustodial parents who were trying, unsuccessfully, to visit more often, (continued)

consistent with the finding that for the youngest children (who had high rates of baseline visitation) and for noncustodial parents who were already visiting their children at least monthly at baseline, the program did not significantly increase visits but did significantly increase discussions and disagreements between the parents.

Although high baseline levels of visits make increases in disagreements more likely, it is less clear whether increases in visits are connected with increases in conflict. For example, the two sites that show increases in visitation as discussed above do not have significant increases in frequency of disagreements or aggressive conflict, suggesting that increases in visits do not lead to negative consequences for the typical family. However, the subgroup analysis described earlier indicates that the only two subgroups that show increases in visits — noncustodial parents with no high school credential and custodial parents in the highest income category — show increases in aggressive conflict and frequency of disagreement, respectively.

The impacts that are presented by site and subgroup do not control for the effects of other family characteristics. Therefore, differences in results by site, for example, could be caused by differences in the characteristics of the samples across sites rather than by differences in how sites implemented the program. Future analyses will examine this issue further.

rather than because of those who were already visiting and were trying to become more active in parental decision-making.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The package of treatments provided by the Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration was aimed at increasing noncustodial parents' formal child support payments, increasing their earnings, and improving their involvement with their children in other ways. Other reports provide evidence that the program did increase noncustodial parents' likelihood of making formal payments and that it increased the earnings of the most disadvantaged fathers somewhat.

This report provides continued evidence that PFS most consistently affected the likelihood that noncustodial parents would make formal child support payments. During the period examined here, the program also increased the average value of formal payments and decreased the average value of informal contributions. However, the program did not change the proportion of noncustodial parents who provided any informal contributions directly to the custodial parent — a positive indication that although the fathers reduced the amount of their informal support, they did not eliminate it. Moreover, for the sample as a whole, PFS did not affect a closely related dimension of noncustodial fathers' involvement: the frequency with which they visited their child. On the other hand, PFS did lead them to attempt to increase their engagement in parenting, as evidenced by an increase in the frequency of disagreements between noncustodial and custodial parents. Fortunately, this increase in disagreements did not result in an increase in aggressive conflict for the overall sample.

The population served by PFS is in many ways a narrow slice of the overall population of nonresident fathers, or even of nonresident fathers with children on welfare. Nevertheless, their relationships with their children turn out to be quite heterogeneous, and, in fact, PFS did affect a wider array of nonfinancial outcomes (such as the frequency of discussions between parents and the frequency of visitation) for particular subgroups than it did for the sample as a whole. If future programs build on these results to tailor their services to the specific needs of particular types of families, they may be able to achieve more consistent improvements in nonfinancial aspects of fathers' involvement than were accomplished by PFS.

For example, the PFS results suggest that interventions that begin when the children are young may be most effective at increasing fathers' engagement in parenting. However, since levels of visitation are fairly high when children are young, interventions may be more likely to increase the fathers' efforts at parenting than their frequency of visitation. At the same time, designers of programs that focus on increasing engagement must recognize that some parents rely on a lack of communication as a method for avoiding conflict, and they must be sensitive to the risk of increasing aggressive conflict in a small group of families.

The evidence presented in this report suggests three specific ways in which programs like PFS could improve their impacts on visitation. First, PFS was not targeted to noncustodial parents who had problems with visitation but, rather, to those who had problems making formal child support payments. The promising results for California and Tennessee suggest that PFS-type interventions *can* improve the frequency of visitation, when targeted to families who have lower levels of involvement than seen in the overall PFS sample. California and Tennes-

see were specifically successful at increasing the regularity of visits, rather than the likelihood that visits would occur at all. It may be that families in which noncustodial parents visit, but infrequently, present more fertile ground for improving relationships than families in which there is no contact at all.

Second, PFS relied on custodial parents to cooperate voluntarily with noncustodial parents' attempts to see their children more frequently. It is possible that an intervention that includes a systematic review and improved specification of visitation agreements, as well as the provision of legal services or other resources specifically aimed at improving access, could have increased the frequency of visitation for a broader group within the PFS sample.

Third, qualitative research has repeatedly suggested that, in low-income communities, both noncustodial and custodial parents are more comfortable with the father's playing a role in his children's life when he has some financial resources to "bring to the table." If future interventions develop employment and training services that are able to bring consistent improvements in a father's capacity to provide financial support, that may improve his position in the complicated negotiation (conscious or unconscious) that occurs between the parents over his role.

Similarly, this report helps to pinpoint the groups of noncustodial parents who are most vulnerable to reducing their informal payments when subject to an intervention like PFS. Although PFS did not reduce the likelihood that any informal contributions would be provided by the noncustodial parent, the program did reduce the dollar value of such contributions by a small amount. These decreases were made primarily by fathers who had either particularly low earnings levels or higher than average levels of involvement with their children — providing further motivation to continue improving programs designed to raise the earnings capacity of the most disadvantaged fathers. For fathers with low earnings, it seems likely that increased pressure to make formal payments causes them to reduce the level of informal support. For those highly involved, the cause of reductions in informal contributions is not yet clear; nevertheless, programs like PFS should consciously work to support the efforts of noncustodial parents who are already substantially involved with their children.

Finally, a number of more general insights arise when one examines formal child support and informal forms of fathers' involvement side by side. First, noncustodial parents' provision of formal payments appears to be driven by very different mechanisms than their decisions about becoming involved with their children in more informal ways — both financial and nonfinancial. Yet much of the current policy debate and systemic reform is aimed more at increasing children's access to formal support than at supporting fathers' involvement in all its complexity. To succeed in supporting families, designers of policies and programs must explicitly recognize these multiple dimensions of fathers' involvement and try to predict, in specific ways, how each may be affected by each proposed policy or intervention. Similarly, to the extent that formal support, informal support, and nonfinancial forms of involvement can be examined separately, research on child support and fathers' involvement will be able to provide much deeper insights into family relationships and the most meaningful ways to support them.

Attention also must be focused on the interrelationships among different forms of fathers' involvement. For example, the close link between father-child contact and informal financial support gives rise to both caution and potential opportunity. The caution is that if the interven-

tions aimed at increasing formal payments have the side effect of reducing informal financial support, they could, over time, also undermine fragile visitation arrangements. Conversely, future interventions that are effective at increasing fathers' access to their children could bring financial benefits, not through the formal child support system but through a distinctly important set of informal arrangements.

Appendix A

Appendix Table A
Parents' Fair Share

Comparison of PFS Impacts on Child Support, Employment, and Earnings for Full PFS Sample and Custodial Parent Survey Sample

	Full PFS Sample	Survey Eligibles (PFS sample randomly assigned March 1995-March 1996)	Fielded Sample (Random subsample of survey eligibles within each site)	Survey Respondents	
				Non-weighted	Weighted
Paid child support					
Months 7-12	5.5 ***	6.1 ***	6.7 ***	7.0 ***	6.7 ***
Amount of child support ($)					
Months 7-12	11	41	53 **	55 *	77 **
NCP employment					
Quarters 3-4	-1.0	-1.1	-2.7	-2.0	-2.7
NCP earnings ($)					
Quarters 3-4	22	24	68	58	22
Sample sizes	5,611	3,063	2,420	2,182	

SOURCES: Surveys of custodial parents, child support enforcement (CSE) payment records, and unemployment insurance (UI) earnings records.

NOTES: A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses in each site are weighted to reflect the proportion of full sample members who were randomly assigned to that site.

This analysis shows slightly different child support impacts for survey respondents than reported in the main tables of the report. It includes the full respondent sample rather than excluding the 8 percent of cases in which the noncustodial parent was living with the mother or the child, or the custodial parent was not living with the child, at the time of the survey.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent.

Appendix B

Appendix Table B
Parents' Fair Share

Levels of Noncustodial Parent Involvement During the Six Months Prior to Survey,[a] for Matched Custodial Parents and Noncustodial Parents

Outcome	Noncustodial Parent Response (Control Group Only)	Custodial Parent Response (Control Group Only)
Frequency of support (%)		
Paid any formal or informal support	72.6	72.9
Paid formal support to CSE[b,c]	51.5	53.1
Paid informal support to CP[d]	52.1	42.1
Any informal cash payments	27.5	17.0
Any in-kind support[e]	46.1	41.3
Average value of support provided ($)		
Average formal and informal support	739	565
Average formal support to CSE[b,c]	408	405
Average informal support to CP[d]	330	160
Average informal cash payments	137	76
Average value of in-kind support[e]	200	86
Average support among those making payments ($)		
Average formal and informal support	*1,018*	*776*
Average formal support to CSE[b,c]	*791*	*762*
Average informal support to CP[d]	*634*	*381*
Average informal cash payments	*499*	*443*
Average value of in-kind support[e]	*434*	*208*
Frequency of NCP contact during past 6 months		
Frequency of visits		
None (past 6 months)	27.1	29.1
Less than once per month	11.2	24.5
At least once per month	61.7	46.4
Once per month	5.2	6.7
2-3 times per month	12.2	8.5
Once per week	9.3	9.6
More than once per week	22.8	13.6
Daily	12.2	8.1
Frequency of phone/mail contact with child		
None	36.8	51.3
Less than once per month	8.6	21.1
Once per month	4.9	2.4
2-3 times per month	5.8	5.0
Once per week	8.7	1.0
More than once per week	17.0	9.1
Daily	18.3	10.1
NCP involvement in child-rearing		
CP spoke to NCP in past 6 months	73.0	69.3
CP discussed child with NCP at least once per month	54.2	39.1
NCP has any involvement in major decisions	52.3	27.7
CP/NCP conflict (reported by CP)		
Parents' relationship is friendly	45.7	34.0
CP/NCP experience frequent disagreements[f]	14.0	26.7

(continued)

Appendix Table B (continued)

Outcome	Noncustodial Parent Response (Control Group Only)	Custodial Parent Response (Control Group Only)
CPs who have spoken to NCP in past 6 months and disagreed a great deal about:		
Child residence	4.2	4.1
Child-rearing	5.3	3.6
How NCP spends money on child	3.4	12.9
How child support is spent	2.8	6.7
Amount of child support	4.6	10.0
Frequency of NCP visits	4.0	11.3
Activities during visits	2.3	8.5
Other child related issues	3.5	7.0
Non-child related issues	2.1	6.0
CP reports that she and NCP disagree and they ever react in the following ways:		
Keep opinions to self	21.5	27.6
Discuss disagreements calmly	25.5	36.5
Argue loudly or shout at each other	15.4	33.4
Hit or throw things at each other	1.4	7.9
CP/NCP experience aggressive conflict[g]	6.2	13.9
Sample size (total=396)	198	198

SOURCES: Matched pairs from the custodial parent and noncustodial parent surveys.

NOTES: A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the full PFS research sample across sites.

If either parent reported that the noncustodial parent lived with the child or the child did not live with the custodial parent, the parents were excluded from this analysis (n=96).

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

Italics indicate analyses that were performed on a subgroup not defined by baseline characteristics and which are therefore considered nonexperimental.

[a]"Six months prior to survey" typically corresponds to months 7-12 for custodial parents and months 8-13 for noncustodial parents, post-random assignment.

[b]Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. For both noncustodial parents and custodial parents, these payments are measured using administrative records, not survey responses.

[c]Since formal payments are measured using administrative records, theoretically the estimates of the proportion paying and amounts paid for the NCP and CP matched pairs should be exactly the same. However, for consistency with informal payment measures, formal payments are estimated for the six months immediately prior to each individual's actual survey interview date. Since NCPs were interviewed, on average, in month 14 of follow-up, and CPs were typically interviewed in month 13, formal payments are shown for slightly different periods.

[d]Informal support includes informal cash payments and in-kind support provided by the noncustodial parent directly to the custodial parent.

[e]Respondents who could not precisely estimate the value of in-kind contributions reported the value using ranges provided by the interviewer. For these respondents (11 percent of CPs and NCPs surveyed), means are estimated using the midpoints of each range.

[f]Measure includes those who reported disagreeing "a great deal" on at least one topic.

[g]Measure includes those who reported "often or always shout at each other" or "ever throw things at each other."

Appendix C

Appendix Table C.1
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on Noncustodial Parent Involvement During the Six Months Prior to Survey,[a] by Gender of the Child[b]

Gender of Child	Child Is Female			Child Is Male			Significant Difference in Impacts?
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	
Financial support							
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[c]	48.8	47.6	1.2	51.6	39.1	12.4 ***	Yes
Paid informal support to CP (%)[d]	41.1	41.9	-0.8	41.7	40.6	1.0	
Average formal support to CSE ($)[c]	400	370	30	395	257	138 ***	
Average informal support to CP ($)[d]	103	149	-46 **	120	149	-28	
Nonfinancial involvement							
NCP ever visited child	69.8	71.0	-1.2	68.9	70.0	-1.0	
NCP and child visit at least once per month	49.0	46.4	2.7	46.3	45.7	0.6	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	44.1	43.8	0.3	43.2	43.5	-0.3	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[e]	34.7	29.9	4.8 *	30.6	28.3	2.3	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[f]	12.1	14.3	-2.2	14.2	11.1	3.1	Yes
Sample size (total=2,004)	494	496		497	517		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from child support enforcement (CSE) payment records, PFS Background Information Forms, and the custodial parent survey.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

[a]"Six months prior to the survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post-random assignment.

[b]"Child" refers to the focal child for the survey, the youngest child on the case for whom the noncustodial parent was called into a hearing and eventually referred to PFS.

[c]Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. They are measured using administrative records rather than survey responses.

[d]Informal support includes informal cash payments and in-kind support provided by the noncustodial parent directly to the custodial parent.

[e]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent disagreed "a great deal" on at least one topic.

[f]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent "often or always shout at each other" or "ever throw things at each other."

Appendix Table C.2
Parents' Fair Share

Impact of PFS on NCP Involvement During the Six Months Prior to Survey,[a] by NCP/CP Marital Status, NCP Formal Payments Prior to Baseline, and Support Provided by NCP's Family

CP/NCP Marital Status	NCP and CP Ever Married			NCP and CP Never Married but Cohabited			NCP Never Married nor Cohabited			Significant Difference
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	in Impacts?
Financial support										
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	60.4	54.5	5.8	50.2	45.3	4.9	46.8	39.9	6.9 **	
Paid informal support to CP (%)[c]	47.3	39.6	7.7	44.4	47.1	-2.7	39.4	39.3	0.1	
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	527	517	10	348	315	33	384	250	134 **	
Average informal support to CP ($)[c]	143	132	10	124	173	-49	100	151	-51 **	
Nonfinancial involvement (%)										
NCP ever visited child	74.7	74.8	-0.2	74.2	74.0	0.2	65.8	67.3	-1.6	
NCP and child visit at least once per month	49.6	46.0	3.6	53.1	48.7	4.4	44.4	44.5	-0.1	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	37.5	39.6	-2.0	48.7	48.7	0.1	43.3	42.8	0.5	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	32.5	27.1	5.3	38.2	33.5	4.7	30.9	28.6	2.4	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	14.2	11.0	3.3	15.5	17.8	-2.3	11.9	11.0	0.9	
Sample size (total=1,939)	159	183		315	300		495	487		

NCP Formal Child Support Payment History	Paid Formal Child Support in Two Quarters Prior to Baseline			Did Not Pay Formal Child Support in Two Quarters Prior to Baseline			Significant Difference
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	in Impacts?
Financial support							
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	70.8	57.8	13 ***	38.8	35.6	3.2	Yes
Paid informal support to CP (%)[c]	45	39.3	5.7	39.4	42	-2.6	Yes
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	680	459	221 ***	240	233	7	Yes
Average informal support to CP ($)[c]	127	134	-7	104	155	-51 **	
Nonfinancial involvement (%)							
NCP ever visited child	74.1	70.9	3.2	66.7	70	-3.3	
NCP and child visit at least once per month	51.3	47.2	4.1	45.7	45.2	0.5	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	44.7	44.3	0.4	43.2	43.2	0.1	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	32.1	27.7	4.4	33	29.7	3.3	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	16.1	12.8	3.3	11.5	12.5	-1	
Sample size (total=2,005)	365	337		626	677		

(continued)

Appendix Table C.2 (continued)

Support by NCP's Family	*NCP's Family Helps with Support of Child*			*NCP's Family Does Not Help with Support of Child*			Significant Difference in Impacts?
Outcome	*Program Group*	*Control Group*	*Impact*	*Program Group*	*Control Group*	*Impact*	
Financial support							
Paid formal support to CSE (%)[b]	*45.8*	*41.8*	*4*	*51.1*	*43.8*	*7.3* ***	
Paid informal support to CP (%)[c]	*62.3*	*66.2*	*-3.9*	*36.3*	*35.6*	*0.7*	
Average formal support to CSE ($)[b]	*293*	*249*	*43*	*420*	*329*	*91* **	
Average informal support to CP ($)[c]	*189*	*371*	*-181* ***	*93*	*100*	*-7*	*Yes*
Nonfinancial involvement (%)							
NCP ever visited child	*87.7*	*91.8*	*-4.1*	*64.9*	*65.7*	*-0.8*	
NCP and child visit at least once per month	*67.9*	*66.4*	*1.4*	*42.8*	*41.4*	*1.4*	
NCP and CP discuss child at least once per month	*61.4*	*65.5*	*-4.1*	*39.4*	*38.7*	*0.7*	
NCP and CP experience frequent disagreements[d]	*40.8*	*40.9*	*-0.1*	*30.7*	*26.4*	*4.3* *	
NCP and CP experience aggressive conflict[e]	*21.4*	*16.6*	*4.8*	*11.1*	*11.8*	*-0.6*	
Sample size (total=2,004)	*196*	*185*		*795*	*828*		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from the custodial parent survey, child support enforcement (CSE) payment records, PFS Background Information Forms, and unemployment insurance (UI) earnings records.

NOTES: Analyses exclude 181 cases in which the custodial parent reported that she did not live with the child or that the noncustodial parent lived with the custodial parent and the child. Of the remaining 2,005 observations, less than 5 percent are missing data on individual items due to nonresponse.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Responses are weighted to reflect the distribution of the full PFS research sample across sites.

Baseline refers to the month of random assignment.

The abbreviation NCP refers to the noncustodial parent; the abbreviation CP refers to the custodial parent.

Italics indicate analyses that were performed on a subgroup not defined by baseline characteristics and which are therefore considered nonexperimental.

[a]"Six months prior to the survey" corresponds to months 7-12 post-random assignment.

[b]Formal child support is defined as payments made by the noncustodial parent through the CSE system. They are measured using administrative records rather than survey responses.

[c]Informal support includes informal cash payments and in-kind support provided by the noncustodial parent directly to the custodial parent.

[d]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent disagreed "a great deal" on at least one topic.

[e]Measure includes custodial parents who reported that they and the noncustodial parent "often or always shouted at each other" or "ever threw things at each other."

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Recent Publications on MDRC Projects

Note: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses. A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site (www.mdrc.org), which also contains copies of MDRC's publications.

Reforming Welfare and Making Work Pay

ReWORKing Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A multifaceted effort to assist states and localities in designing and implementing their welfare reform programs. The project includes a series of "how-to" guides, conferences, briefings, and customized, in-depth technical assistance.

After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States. 1997. Dan Bloom.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Business Partnerships: How to Involve Employers in Welfare Reform. 1998. Amy Brown, Maria Buck, Erik Skinner.

Learnfare: How to Implement a Mandatory Stay-in-School Program for Teenage Parents on Welfare. 1998. David Long, Johannes Bos.

Promoting Participation: How to Increase Involvement in Welfare-to-Work Activities. 1999. Gayle Hamilton, Susan Scrivener.

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Steady Work and Better Jobs: How to Help Low-Income Parents Sustain Employment and Advance in the Workforce. 2000. Julie Strawn, Karin Martinson.

Project on Devolution and Urban Change

A multi-year study in four major urban counties — Cuyahoga County, Ohio (which includes the city of Cleveland), Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia — that examines how welfare reforms are being implemented and affect poor people, their neighborhoods, and the institutions that serve them.

Big Cities and Welfare Reform: Early Implementation and Ethnographic Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change. 1999. Janet Quint, Kathryn Edin, Maria Buck, Barbara Fink, Yolanda Padilla, Olis Simmons-Hewitt, Mary Valmont.

Food Security and Hunger in Poor, Mother-Headed Families in Four U.S. Cities. 2000. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

Focusing on Fathers

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

A demonstration for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare. PFS aims to improve the men's employment and earnings, reduce child poverty by increasing child support payments, and assist the fathers in playing a broader constructive role in their children's lives.

Low-Income Parents and the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. 1996. Earl Johnson, Fred Doolittle.

Working with Low-Income Cases: Lessons for the Child Support Enforcement System from Parents' Fair Share. 1998. Fred Doolittle, Suzanne Lynn.

Building Opportunities, Enforcing Obligations: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Parents' Fair Share. 1998. Fred Doolittle, Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, Sharon Rowser.

Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood (Russell Sage Foundation). 1999. Earl Johnson, Ann Levine, Fred Doolittle.

Parenting and Providing: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Paternal Involvement. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cindy Redcross.

Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment. 2000. John M. Martinez, Cynthia Miller.

The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum. 2000. Eileen Hayes, with Kay Sherwood.

Financial Incentives

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Minnesota Family Investment Program

An evaluation of Minnesota's pilot welfare reform initiative, which aims to encourage work, alleviate poverty, and reduce welfare dependence.

MFIP: An Early Report on Minnesota's Approach to Welfare Reform. 1995. Virginia Knox, Amy Brown, Winston Lin.

Making Welfare Work and Work Pay: Implementation and 18-Month Impacts of the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 1997. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox, Patricia Auspos, Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Alan Orenstein.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 2000:
Volume 1: Effects on Adults. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox, Lisa Gennetian, Martey Dodoo, Jo Anna Hunter, Cindy Redcross.
Volume 2: Effects on Children. Lisa Gennetian, Cynthia Miller.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: A Summary of the Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, Lisa Gennetian.

New Hope Project

A test of a community-based, work-focused antipoverty program and welfare alternative operating in Milwaukee.

The New Hope Offer: Participants in the New Hope Demonstration Discuss Work, Family, and Self-Sufficiency. 1996. Dudley Benoit.

Creating New Hope: Implementation of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare. 1997. Thomas Brock, Fred Doolittle, Veronica Fellerath, Michael Wiseman.

Who Got New Hope? 1997. Michael Wiseman.

An Early Look at Community Service Jobs in the New Hope Demonstration. 1998. Susan Poglinco, Julian Brash, Robert Granger.

New Hope for People with Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare. 1999. Johannes Bos, Aletha Huston, Robert Granger, Greg Duncan, Thomas Brock, Vonnie McLoyd.

Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients. Reports on the Self-Sufficiency Project are available from: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), 275 Slater St., Suite 900, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H9, Canada. Tel.: 613-237-4311; Fax: 613-237-5045. In the United States, the reports are also available from MDRC.

Creating an Alternative to Welfare: First-Year Findings on the Implementation, Welfare Impacts, and Costs of the Self-Sufficiency Project (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation [SRDC]). 1995. Tod Mijanovich, David Long.

The Struggle for Self-Sufficiency: Participants in the Self-Sufficiency Project Talk About Work, Welfare, and Their Futures (SRDC). 1995. Wendy Bancroft, Sheila Currie Vernon.

Do Financial Incentives Encourage Welfare Recipients to Work? Initial 18-Month Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project (SRDC). 1996. David Card, Philip Robins.

When Work Pays Better Than Welfare: A Summary of the Self-Sufficiency Project's Implementation, Focus Group, and Initial 18-Month Impact Reports (SRDC). 1996.

How Important Are "Entry Effects" in Financial Incentive Programs for Welfare Recipients? Experimental Evidence from the Self-Sufficiency Project (SRDC). 1997. David Card, Philip Robins, Winston Lin.

Do Work Incentives Have Unintended Consequences? Measuring "Entry Effects" in the Self-Sufficiency Project (SRDC). 1998. Gordon Berlin, Wendy Bancroft, David Card, Winston Lin, Philip Robins.

When Financial Incentives Encourage Work: Complete 18-Month Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project (SRDC). 1998. Winston Lin, Philip Robins, David Card, Kristen Harknett, Susanna Lui-Gurr.

Does SSP Plus Increase Employment? The Effect of Adding Services to the Self-Sufficiency Project's Financial Incentives (SRDC). 1999. Gail Quets, Philip Robins, Elsie Pan, Charles Michalopoulos, David Card.

When Financial Work Incentives Pay for Themselves: Early Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project's Applicant Study (SRDC). 1999. Charles Michalopoulos, Philip Robins, David Card.

The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects of a Financial Work Incentive on Employment and Income (SRDC). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, David Card, Lisa Gennetian, Kristen Harknett, Philip K. Robins.

The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects on Children of a Program That Increased Parental Employment and Income (SRDC). 2000. Pamela Morris, Charles Michalopoulos.

Time Limits

Cross-State Study of Time-Limited Welfare

An examination of the implementation of some of the first state-initiated time-limited welfare programs.

Implementing Time-Limited Welfare: Early Experiences in Three States. 1995. Dan Bloom, David Butler.

The View from the Field: As Time Limits Approach, Welfare Recipients and Staff Talk About Their Attitudes and Expectations. 1997. Amy Brown, Dan Bloom, David Butler.

Welfare Time Limits: An Interim Report Card. 1999. Dan Bloom.

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

An evaluation of Connecticut's statewide time-limited welfare program, which includes financial work incentives and requirements to participate in employment-related services aimed at rapid job placement. This study provides some of the earliest information on the effects of time limits in major urban areas.

Early Data on the Implementation of Connecticut's Jobs First Program. 1997. Dan Bloom, Mary Andes.

Jobs First: Early Implementation of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 1998. Dan Bloom, Mary Andes, Claudia Nicholson.

Connecticut Post-Time Limit Tracking Study: Three-Month Survey Results. 1998. Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Dan Bloom, Richard Hendra, Johanna Walter.

Connecticut Post-Time Limit Tracking Study: Six-Month Survey Results. 1999. Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Dan Bloom.

Jobs First: Implementation and Early Impacts of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 2000. Dan Bloom, Laura Melton, Charles Michalopoulos, Susan Scrivener, Johanna Walter.

Florida's Family Transition Program

An evaluation of Florida's initial time-limited welfare program, which includes services, requirements, and financial work incentives intended to reduce long-term welfare receipt and help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

The Family Transition Program: An Early Implementation Report on Florida's Time-Limited Welfare Initiative. 1995. Dan Bloom.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Early Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1997. Dan Bloom, James Kemple, Robin Rogers-Dillon.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1998. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, James Kemple, Nandita Verma.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Three-Year Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1999. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, James Kemple, Nandita Verma.

Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project

An evaluation of Vermont's statewide welfare reform program, which includes a work requirement after a certain period of welfare receipt, and financial work incentives.

WRP: Implementation and Early Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project. 1998. Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter, Patricia Auspos.

Forty-Two Month Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project. 1999. Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

WRP: Key Findings from the Forty-Two-Month Client Survey. 2000. Dan Bloom, Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

Mandatory Welfare Employment Programs

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Conceived and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with support from the U.S. Department of Education, this is the largest-scale evaluation ever conducted of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Adult Education for People on AFDC: A Synthesis of Research (U.S. Department of Education [ED]/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS]). 1995. Edward Pauly.

Early Findings on Program Impacts in Three Sites (HHS/ED). 1995. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander.

Five Years After: The Long-Term Effects of Welfare-to-Work Programs (Russell Sage Foundation). 1995. Daniel Friedlander, Gary Burtless.

Monthly Participation Rates in Three Sites and Factors Affecting Participation Levels in Welfare-to-Work Programs (HHS/ED). 1995. Gayle Hamilton.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Evaluating Two Welfare-to-Work Program Approaches: Two-Year Findings on the Labor Force Attachment and Human Capital Development Programs in Three Sites (HHS/ED). 1997. Gayle Hamilton, Thomas Brock, Mary Farrell, Daniel Friedlander, Kristen Harknett.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Implementation, Participation Patterns, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of the Portland (Oregon) Welfare-to-Work Program (HHS/ED). 1998. Susan Scrivener, Gayle Hamilton, Mary Farrell, Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander, Marisa Mitchell, Jodi Nudelman, Christine Schwartz.

Do Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs Affect the Well-Being of Children? A Synthesis of Child Research Conducted as Part of the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (HHS/ED). 2000. Gayle Hamilton.

Evaluating Alternative Welfare-to-Work Approaches: Two-Year Impacts for Eleven Programs (HHS/ED). 2000. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander, Gayle Hamilton, JoAnn Rock, Marisa Mitchell, Jodi Nudelman, Amanda Schweder, Laura Storto.

Impacts on Young Children and Their Families Two Years After Enrollment: Findings from the Child Outcomes Study (HHS/ED). 2000. Sharon McGroder, Martha Zaslow, Kristin Moore, Suzanne LeMenestrel.

Los Angeles's Jobs-First GAIN Program

An evaluation of Los Angeles's refocused GAIN (welfare-to-work) program, which emphasizes rapid employment. This is the first in-depth study of a full-scale "work first" program in one of the nation's largest urban areas.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Preliminary Findings on Participation Patterns and First-Year Impacts. 1998. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: First-Year Findings on Participation Patterns and Impacts. 1999. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Final Report on a Work First Program in a Major Urban Center. 2000. Stephen Freedman, Jean Knab, Lisa Gennetian, David Navarro.

Teen Parents on Welfare

Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long-Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD). 1998. Robert Granger, Rachel Cytron.

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

New Chance Demonstration

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children. 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study. 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

Other

Can They All Work? A Study of the Employment Potential of Welfare Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program. 1995. James Riccio, Stephen Freedman.

Florida's Project Independence: Benefits, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of Florida's JOBS Program. 1995. James Kemple, Daniel Friedlander, Veronica Fellerath.

From Welfare to Work Among Lone Parents in Britain: Lessons for America. 1996. James Riccio.

Employment and Community Initiatives

Connections to Work Project

A study of local efforts to increase competition in the choice of providers of employment services for welfare recipients and other low-income populations. The project also provides assistance to cutting-edge local initiatives aimed at helping such people access and secure jobs.

Tulsa's IndEx Program: A Business-Led Initiative for Welfare Reform and Economic Development. 1997. Maria Buck.

Washington Works: Sustaining a Vision of Welfare Reform Based on Personal Change, Work Preparation, and Employer Involvement. 1998. Susan Gooden.

Cost Analysis Step by Step: A How-to Guide for Planners and Providers of Welfare-to-Work and Other Employment and Training Programs. 1998. David Greenberg, Ute Appenzeller.

Designing and Administering a Wage-Paying Community Service Employment Program Under TANF: Some Considerations and Choices. 1999. Kay Sherwood.

San Francisco Works: Toward an Employer-Led Approach to Welfare Reform and Workforce Development. 2000. Steven Bliss.

Jobs-Plus Initiative

A multi-site effort to greatly increase employment among public housing residents.

A Research Framework for Evaluating Jobs-Plus, a Saturation and Place-Based Employment Initiative for Public Housing Residents. 1998. James Riccio.

Mobilizing Public Housing Communities for Work: Origins and Early Accomplishments of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. James Riccio.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Section 3 Public Housing Study

An examination of the effectiveness of Section 3 of the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act in affording employment opportunities for public housing residents.

Lessons from the Field on the Implementation of Section 3 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). 1996. Maxine Bailey, Suzanne Lynn.

Canada's Earnings Supplement Project

A test of an innovative financial incentive intended to expedite the reemployment of displaced workers and encourage full-year work by seasonal or part-year workers, thereby also reducing receipt of Unemployment Insurance.

Implementing the Earnings Supplement Project: A Test of a Re-employment Incentive (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation). 1997. Howard Bloom, Barbara Fink, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Wendy Bancroft, Doug Tattrie.

Testing a Re-employment Incentive for Displaced Workers: The Earnings Supplement Project. 1999. Howard Bloom, Saul Schwartz, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Suk-Won Lee.

Education Reform

Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

Career Academies: Early Implementation Lessons from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1996. James Kemple, JoAnn Leah Rock.

Career Academies: Communities of Support for Students and Teachers — Emerging Findings from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1997. James Kemple.

Career Academies: Building Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities Through Employer Partnerships. 1999. James Kemple, Susan Poglinco, Jason Snipes.

Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High School. 2000. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

Project GRAD

This evaluation examines Project GRAD, an education initiative targeted at urban schools and combining a number of proven or promising reforms.

Building the Foundation for Improved Student Performance: The Pre-Curricular Phase of Project GRAD Newark. 2000. Sandra Ham, Fred C. Doolittle, Glee Ivory Holton.

LILAA Initiative

This study of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative explores the efforts of five adult literacy programs in public libraries to improve learner persistence.

So I Made Up My Mind: Introducing a Study of Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs. 2000. John T. Comings, Sondra Cuban.

Project Transition

A demonstration program that tested a combination of school-based strategies to facilitate students' transition from middle school to high school.

Project Transition: Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed. 1999. Janet Quint, Cynthia Miller, Jennifer Pastor, Rachel Cytron.

Equity 2000

Equity 2000 is a nationwide initiative sponsored by the College Board to improve low-income students' access to college. The MDRC paper examines the implementation of Equity 2000 in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Getting to the Right Algebra: The Equity 2000 Initiative in Milwaukee Public Schools. 1999. Sandra Ham, Erica Walker.

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

MDRC Working Papers on Research Methodology

A new series of papers that explore alternative methods of examining the implementation and impacts of programs and policies.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Estimating Program Impacts on Student Achievement Using "Short" Interrupted Time Series. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Using Cluster Random Assignment to Measure Program Impacts: Statistical Implications for the Evaluation of Education Programs. 1999. Howard Bloom, Johannes Bos, Suk-Won Lee.

About MDRC

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and San Francisco.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods such as large-scale studies to determine a program's effects, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.

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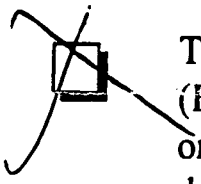

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